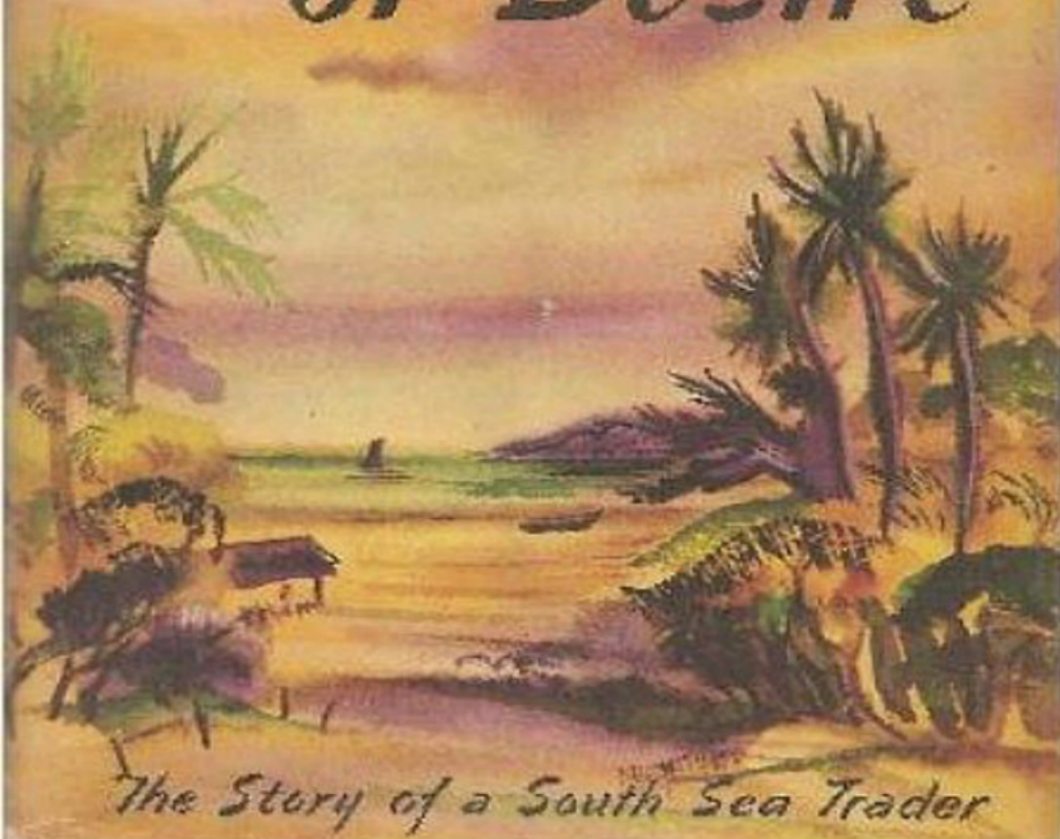


ROBERT DEAN FRISBIE

The Island of Desire



The Story of a South Sea Trader

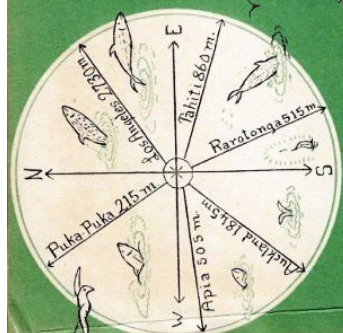
SUVARROW ATOLL

162°05' West
13°15' South

Joe Bird Shoal
Tucker Reef
Anchorage Island
Lagoon
Shallow
Passage
Tahiti
Rarotonga
Papeete
Rukia Puka
Apia

Distances:
Rukia Puka 215 m
Apia 509 m
Rarotonga 515 m
Tahiti 860 m
Papeete 1731 m

Other labels: Joe Bird Shoal, Tucker Reef, Anchorage Island, Lagoon, Shallow, Passage, Tahiti, Rarotonga, Papeete, Rukia Puka, Apia.



A NUMBER OF YEARS ago Robert Dean Frisbie set up a trading station on Danger Island, a lonely paradise four hundred miles northeast of Samoa. This autobiographical story relates how the author fell in love with a charming Polynesian girl, how he became part of the life of the island, how he eventually survived a man-sized South Sea hurricane.

When Frisbie went to meet Desire under the magnolia trees, the islanders laughed about it, thinking they were having an affair. Constable Benny even arrested Desire on a charge of loitering after curfew. But when the American built a house and gave a house party for such friends as Parson Sea Foam, Vicar Araipu, Heathen William, and Desire's many sisters, they saw that he was really in love. During the feast Frisbie and Desire were officially married.

The next six years were wonderfully happy ones for both of them. Desire gave birth first to Johnny (a girl), then Jakey, Elaine, and Nga. The charm of their lives is spread before the reader with the miraculous color and texture of a Gauguin painting. Frisbie's deep love for Desire, his portrayal of the glamorous South Seas, his bursts of affectionate humor, and his pride in his half-Polynesian "cowboys" play a part in this remarkable story.

The Island of Desire

BOOKS BY

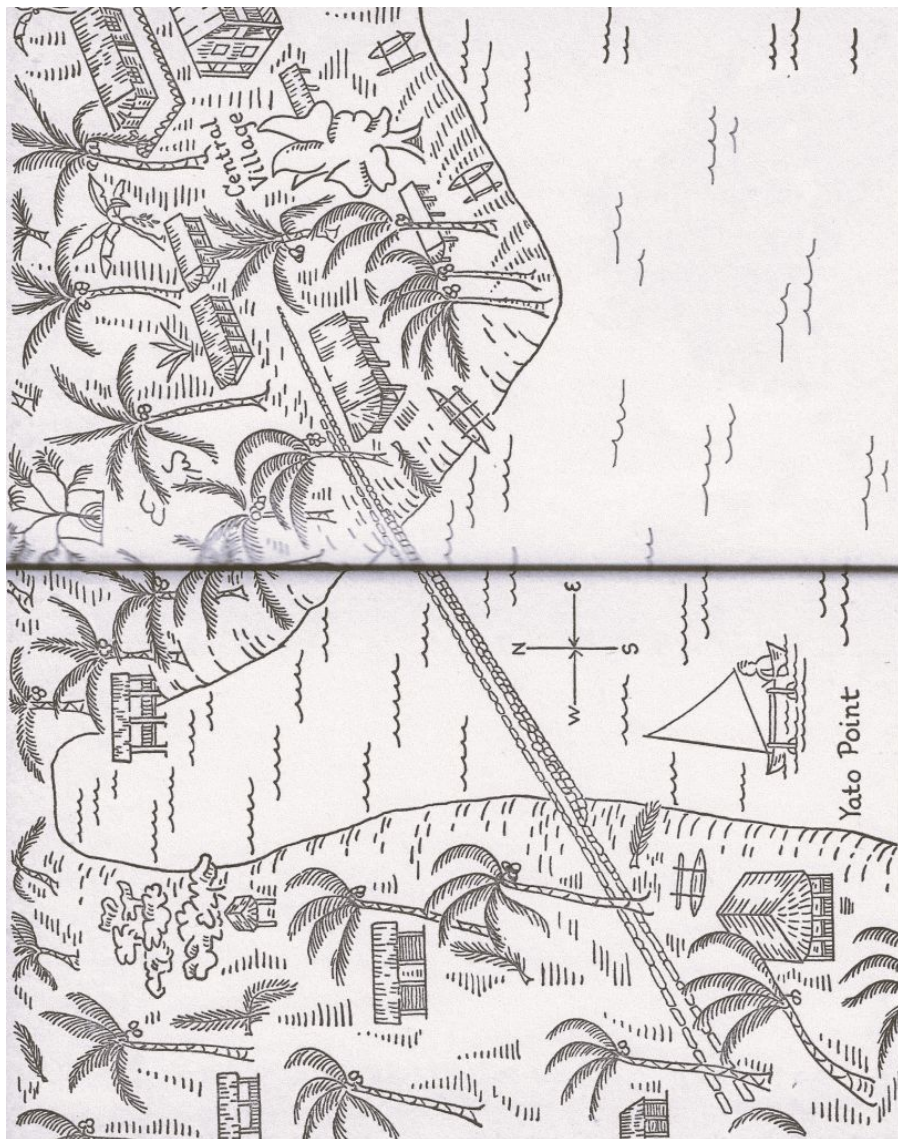
ROBERT DEAN FRISBIE

The Book of Puka-Puka (1929)

My Tahiti (1937)

Mr. Moonlight's Island (1939)

The Island of Desire (1944)





The Island of Desire

THE STORY OF A SOUTH SEA TRADER

BY ROBERT DEAN FRISBIE

DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & Co., Inc.

GARDEN CITY, N.Y. 1944

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To the cowboys:
JOHNNY, JAKY, ELAINE, NGA

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BENNY: *constable of Central Village*

BONES: *the satyr, father of Poaza and Strange-Eyes*

BOSUN-WOMAN: *the village undertaker*

BRIBERY, DEACON: *the crooked-legged tobacco addict*

BRIBERY, JR.: *son of Deacon Bribery*

DESIRE: *wife of Ropati*

EARS: *constable of Leeward Village*

ELIHU: *the supercargo*

FIRST-BORN: *son of Parson Sea Foam*

JOHNNY (FLORENCE NGATOKORUAIMATAUEA): *the author's first child*

LETTER: *a bloodthirsty deaf-mute*

LITTLE SEA: *wife of a deacon*

LULUIA: *the youth who insults the losers*

MALOKU: *Desire's half sister*

MAMA: *Ropati's cook, wife of William*

MISS LEGS: *who sleeps in a house with loose floor boards*

MISS MEMORY: *Desire's fraternity name*

MISS TERN: *The village Jezebel*

MISS WHITE TERN: *Tangi's fraternity name*

MR. BREADFRUIT: *poker-playing councilman of Leeward Village*

MR. HORSE: *one of Pio's fraternity names*

MR. MANOWAR HAWK: *another of Pio's fraternity names*

MR. MOONLIGHT: *Ropati's fraternity name*

MR. SCRATCH: *the old gentleman who doesn't savvy much*

MRS. SCRATCH: *wobbling wife of Mr. Scratch*

PATI: *one of Desire's sisters*

PILALA-WOMAN: *a shriveled old termagant*

PIO: *Tanges wonderboy of the cocolelé*

RACHEL: *daughter of Maloku*

ROPATI: *the trader and author*

SEA FOAM: *parson of Danger Island*

STRANGE-EYES: *daughter of Bones*

TALA: *mother of Desire*

TANGI: *one of Desire's sisters*

TIBBITTS: *the politician who visited Danger Island*

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PART II

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JOHNNY: *Ropati's oldest child, one of the four "cowboys"*

NGA: *Ropati's youngest daughter, aged four*

OLI-OLI: *cook aboard the Hurry Home*

POWELL, RONALD: *of Palmerston Island, Pratt's companion aboard
the Vagus*

PRATT, JOHN: *Englishman, owner of the Vagus*

PROSPECT, CAPTAIN: *owner and navigator of the Hurry Home*

TAGI, FIRST MATE: *second-in-command of the Hurry Home*

TAKATAKA, SECOND MATE: *third member of the Hurry Home crew*

PART I

DANGER ISLAND

Chapter I

IN A PAST inconceivably remote it must have been the peak of a volcano, jutting from the midst of a sea whose solitude was broken only by flocks of migrating birds, a pod of sperm whales lumbering down from the Austral ice fields, or the intangible things of the mythic world; the spirits of Storm, Fair Weather, Night, Day, and Dawn.

Coral polyps attached themselves to the steep walls of the volcano to build their submarine gardens a mile or more to sea, surrounding the island with a reef and shallow lagoon; then erosion, the battering of the Pacific combers, and subsidence, until finally the volcano had disappeared, leaving a blue lagoon shimmering in the sunlight, a barrier reef threaded with islets and sand cays; Danger Island, or PukaPuka—Land of Little Hills.

So it was called by the first Polynesians who came here, centuries ago. It appears now much as it did then: a tiny place compared with the vastness of the sea surrounding it. The low hills, scarcely twenty feet high, are shaded by cordia and hernandia trees, groves of coconut palms, thickets of magnolia bushes; and between the hills lie patches of level land where taro is grown in diked swamps and where the thatched houses are half obscured by clumps of bananas, gardenia bushes, and the gawky-limbed pandanus.

There are three islets on the roughly triangular reef: Ko to the southeast; Frigate Bird to the southwest; and the main islet of Walé to the north. Ko and Frigate Bird are uninhabited eight months of the year, while on the crescent-shaped bay of Walé, facing southward toward the lagoon, are the three villages: Ngake, Roto, and Yato—or Windward, Central, and Leeward.

The trading station is in Central Village. I, Ropati, live in its upstairs rooms, while the two downstairs rooms have been vacant since the station was closed. The building is glaringly white, shaped like a packing case, has an asbestos-cement roof, balconies in front and back, and, leading from the balconies to the living quarters, doorways just high enough so I can crack my head against the lintels.

Across the village road from the station stands the schoolhouse, another boxlike coral building, but with a thatch roof, pleasing to the eye. The great glaringly ugly church, with its red iron roof, stands to one side of the schoolhouse, while elsewhere, to east and west, lagoonward and inland, are the Central Village houses, all save Araipu's native store, attractively built of wattle and thatch.

The rumbling sound that rises and falls fitfully is not caused so much by the surf on the outer reef as it is by the snores of my six hundred and fifty neighbors. All are asleep, for it is midday and they must be refreshed for the night's toil ahead. There is old Mr. Scratch, Deacon Bribery, and Bones

piping off the watches under a coconut tree. There is William the Heathen folded on my woodbox, his head between his bony knees. There is pretty Miss Strange-Eyes, daughter of Bones, without any clothes at all, fast asleep in a canoe, while a rooster on one of the crossbeams stares at her perplexed. And there is Constable Benny, growling like Cerberus as he guards the village in his dreams.

I walk on tiptoe to the lagoon beach lest I waken the toil-exhausted neighbors; but even here there are scores of toddlers, aged one to ten, fast asleep in the shady places.

The beach of the big crescent-shaped bay is not very attractive. The sand is scarcely white, and there is plenty of rubbish strewn about; but the bay itself and the lagoon beyond are clean, blue, sparkling, enticing. Almost daily I explore its submarine mountain ranges and chase the grotesquely beautiful fish among its crevices and caverns.

Today I follow the beach, first eastward, then gradually to the south. The great piles of plaited fronds are coverings for canoes; the dash of red is the iron roof of Araipu's store; Miss Legs sleeps over yonder, in the little house with unnailed floor boards that can be pushed up from below if one is lonely and wants to talk to Miss Legs.

Following the curved beach, I leave Central Village, then turn inland to stop at an excavation ten feet deep and one hundred yards across. It is green with taro leaves that undulate under the puffs of wind; along its border are gardenia bushes. The Windward Village girls stop here, on moonlight nights, to gather flowers for their hair before proceeding to the Place of Love.

After skirting the taro bed and walking a little farther through the groves I come to the southeast point of the main islet—the Point of Utupoa. Here the coconut trees give place to pandanus, then to magnolia and pemphis bushes, then to pure-white sand with an occasional greasy-leaved *tournefortia* bush; and finally the sand spills out in the shallows.

Southward from the Point of Utupoa, at low tide, there is a brick-red highway, a quarter of a mile wide and four miles long, leading to a similar point on the far islet of Ko. On the east side of this highway the reef combers form an azure-tinted wall that rises and subsides and roars unceasingly; on the other side is the lagoon, while a half mile across the lagoon is another highway, or shallows, this one leading from the southwest point of the main islet to Frigate Bird Islet.

It is here at Utupoa that the children come to fly their kites; it is under the big *tournefortia* bush that I spend many an afternoon with M. Michel de Montaigne; it is in the deep pool in the shallows that the village girls duck and turn somersaults, that the wild youth cool their heated bodies, that the Seventh-Day Adventist missionary once a year baptizes his converts; it is here at Utupoa that the Windward Village youths and maidens come on moonlight nights to dance and sing—in a word, this is one of the many places of love.

The sunlight reflected from the sand hurts my eyes. I leave the point to

walk along the east side of the islet, at the edge of the pandanus trees, where it is shady; and presently I pass Windward Village, which stretches from the outer beach across an arm of the islet to the lagoon beach. The houses are not very interesting and the place is not very tidy, but I make a little detour inland so as to steal a wistful glance at Desire, the prettiest Mongolian-eyed girl in the South Seas. She sits in her cookhouse, clothed only in a strip of cloth around her waist; and she does not try to cover herself when I approach, for she is an innocent virgin, bless her! If I ever marry, I hope it will be to a girl like Desire. After telling her this I move back to the beach to pass the stronghold of Christian puritanism: the residence of Horatio and Susanna Augustus, the native resident agent *et ux*.

The Augustuses are high-island natives, missionary educated, too sanctimonious for my taste, living evidence of the disastrous result of attempting to civilize primitive people. They speak a little English and, as schoolteachers, try to teach it to the children. So far—seven years—they have taught only a few of the brighter scholars that good morning differs from good-by. A couple of days ago on the causeway I met a boy of sixteen who solemnly took off his hat, bowed stiffly, and in perfect seriousness greeted me with “Oh ... yes!” spoken slowly, with a longish pause between the words. However, the Augustuses believe they are doing a noble work in teaching English.

They treat me with respect though they are convinced that their government position elevates them above a mere epicurean beachcomber. When I visit them they make a pretense of European culture, such as serving weak tea and remarkable scones flavored with banana extract, but at other times they are simply a native family living in a wattle-and-thatch house on the outer beach. I am, as formerly, the only white man on the island.

Ahead of me, now, is a mile of straight, high beach, unbroken save for a group of huts used by Central Village when the island reserves are opened for the copra makers. A stretch of brick-red coral, one hundred yards wide, lies between the beach and the barrier reef, which last, now that I am on the windward side of the island, blusters, shakes its white mane, roars mightily. Beyond is the sea, and the horizon clouds, and the fluffy little balls of cotton wool separating themselves from the eastern rack to scud cockily overhead.

Note how the coconut fronds and the pandanus leaves are flung out horizontally in the wind. Note the misty wraiths of reef spray drifting up the beach and into the jungle. Fill your lungs with the clean salty smell of the sea! Would you exchange this for U.S.H.A., Unit 168-b, or even for the flashiest apartment in Metropolis?

The white pebble beach is hurting my eyes, for there is no shade, and at the edge of the trees the beach is covered with lumps of coral too jagged for my bare feet. So through the magnolia bushes I follow a path laid with steppingstones and enter the refreshingly cool shade of the atoll jungle to come to a path leading parallel to the outer beach. Now and then I pass a

deserted hut, and taro beds bordered by banana plants and gardenia bushes. I pick blossoms to put behind my ears. No one is in sight; the place seems to have been deserted for months. Inland, doves coo in a note of infinite sadness, and sometimes one flaps noisily among the hernandia trees. Lizards and mice scurry over the fallen fronds; land crabs wave their claws at the passer-by; ghost terris flutter like butterflies in the shadows—but there is no human being save myself.

Just now the inland groves and taro beds are closed. Central Village has put a tapu on them so the people will not steal the nuts or kill the nesting birds. Only a white man dares violate this tapu; if a native did so, the Goddess Taira would cause him to fall when he climbs a coconut tree or would cause death by a tumor in the armpit.

I pick from the ground a young coconut the size of a crab apple; then, tearing a leaf from an overhanging frond, with my fingernail I cut away the tough but pliant midrib and jab the thick end of it into the immature coconut. It is my intention to take it home for some village child to play with, but the temptation to play myself is too great, so, swinging it round my head, I let it fly into the air—as children catapult crab apples with a willow stick. It soars over the highest coconut trees to land in the shore bush. I grin, delighted, and start breaking my way through the bush to retrieve my toy. Do I look silly with a gardenia blossom behind my ear, flinging immature coconuts into the air? Well, we get that way on the atolls; many of the inhibitions of our civilized training are happily lost.

Here is the toy, and here is a wide avenue leading to the Point of Smoking Seas. I walk down the avenue, for the gloomy groves are uncanny and the loneliness preys on my spirits. Beyond the shore bush the wind, the roar of crashing seas, the smell of the ocean break suddenly on my senses.

The trading station is now due south; I am halfway round the islet. Here the barrier reef is close to the beach, forming a point sharper than a right angle. Beyond the point, over a shoal stretch of sea bottom, the current meets the Pacific rollers and they pile up in a furious maelstrom. The sight sometimes frightens me. Staring at the rearing, plunging patch of sea, I recall how Satyr Bones swam into it to rescue his woman, who had been washed over the reef. Somehow he lived, but the woman was dead when, like a hairy sea beast, he dragged her out of the breakers.

Beyond the Point of Smoking Seas I pass another group of copra makers' huts, then walk doggedly along the beach, which curves gradually to the west and south. Though my eyes pain me, I grin and bear it, for there is no parallel path inland; and the sand seems less glaringly white when I recall that here, on moonlight nights, is pagan loveliness; here is where the youths and maidens of Central and Leeward villages come for their nightlong dances, their singing, and their love-making. Alas! now under the disillusioning sunlight I can see only little paths leading into the magnolia bushes—leading to the love nests of the young unmarried.

At the edge of the shallows is a conglomerate of sand and shells that has somehow caked into a limestone-like rock so that the wild youth can carve their names for posterity to read: Mr. Horse, Mr. Coconut, Jack Dempsey, Eagle-wing, Mr. Banana, Messrs. Achilles and Ajax, Mr. Casanova; Princess X, Miss White Tern, Miss Flower, Miss Love, Miss Mermaid, Miss Memory — fraternity names that the young people take when they enter the House of Youth or the House of Young Women—between puberty and marriage.

A little farther along the outer beach and I come suddenly to Yato-Leeward Village. I have nearly finished the circuit of the main islet.

Yato Point is on the west side of the crescent-shaped bay. A half mile away is the Point of Utupoa, where I stood a couple of hours ago; and here is the wide reef highway leading to Frigate Bird Islet, flooded now, for the tide is coming in; and there, on the outer edge of the reef, is the beacon of the boat passage, while beyond it, at sea, is the offing where the trading schooners lie. Far out at sea, to the southwest, breakers are sometimes visible; they are on Te Arai Reef, which stretches four miles due west from Frigate Bird and ends in a barren sand cay.

Leeward Village is spotlessly clean. About half the houses are built of chipped coral blocks; the rest are of wattle and thatch, with one red iron roof where an Aitutaki carpenter lives. This prominent citizen came here to remove the only beautiful feature from our church, the thatch roof, and put a galvanized iron one in its place. During the four years of exhausting toil required to complete this great innovation, the carpenter fell in love with a Leeward Village maiden. Now she has claimed him: he is happily lost forever. All day long he sweats in his iron-roofed house, and, judging by the husky and wanton appearance of his wife, all night long too.

On the east side of Yato Point I stop to glance at my house site and for the thousandth time visualize the wattle-and-thatch palace I have always planned to build here. I feel the cool trade wind blowing on me from across the bay; I hear the wind singing in the palm fronds, and the thundery combers far away on the Point of Smoking Seas; I gaze across the lagoon toward Frigate Bird Islet, Ko Islet, the eastern reef, Utupoa Point, the cloud mountains of the sky, the entire littoral of the bay, the villages, the causeway, and the fishpond beyond it. This is indeed an Ogygian place for a renegade Ulysses to forget the world, and eat lotus, and love a South Sea Calypso.

The causeway is six feet high, six wide, and about three hundred yards long. Made of coral blocks gray with age, it stretches across an arm of the bay from Leeward to Central Village, and thus it fences off a fishpond belonging to Leeward Village and full of milk mullet and young turtles.

When a trading schooner is in the offing and the hard-doers of the South Seas are drinking deeply they habitually fall from the causeway into the fishpond. In fact groups of natives often camp at one end of the causeway solely to observe South Sea traders falling into the fishpond, when, the natives having had their money's worth, they become a rescue gang.

Safely across the causeway, I enter the walled compound of Parson Sea Foam. I smile at his pretty daughters, examine his huge coral-lime parsonage with its silly little four-foot verandas in front and in back, and shake hands and yarn for a little space with the parson himself. He is partially bald, has pendulous cheeks, several chins, and elephantiasis. Presently he swings an elephantiac leg through the doorway, follows it, then reappears with an ancient tin of beans. He gives it to me, with a suitable text—for he is always giving me perished provisions, which in turn I bury quickly, before they explode.

Finally I pass the hut of that terrible loudmouthed creature, Pilala-woman; then the house of First-Born, son of Sea Foam; and at last I enter my own cookhouse at the lagoon side of the trading station, where old Mama has the teakettle boiling and greets me with an interrogative smile.

To me several features of this walk have seemed remarkable. There has been an appearance and a feeling of cleanness. I have been aware of the sea as an enclosing presence, both sheltering and dangerous. But, most important, I have noticed that the atoll belongs to the organic world; it is a living island. Some stretches of beach have appeared to be fine yellow sand, but if I had examined it closely I should have found that each grain was a minute shell or the skeleton of a coral polyp. Think of the untold billions of creatures that have lived and died for ages to build up a coral atoll! And think of the untold billions of creatures that are laboring even now, as I close my journal, so that Danger Island may grow slowly upward at precisely the same rate that the sea bottom subsides! Here is a land becoming rather than one become, a land functioning in Time rather than in Space!

The other morning Araipu, who is both the storekeeper and vicar of Puka-Puka Atoll, came to the cookhouse while I was having coffee. I asked him to join me, which he did; but before he had tasted his coffee he started talking about Abraham.

“This Abraham,” he said, “worshiped the sun. He was a heathen like William. He would get up in the morning at dawn”—here Araipu pointed to the sun rising over the coconut trees of Windward Village—“and would pray to the sun! He thought the sun was a god! He was a foolish heathen like that old fellow William!”

“I don’t recall anything about Abraham worshipping the sun,” I broke in. “It isn’t in the Bible, is it?”

“No,” Araipu replied; “I read it in a book Parson Sea Foam brought from Tahiti. The book says that Abraham would kneel facing the east, and bow down to the sun, like this,” and here the vicar bowed.

“Araipti, let’s go for a picnic. I’m fed up with sanctimonious resident agents, village smells, noise, heat. Let’s go bird hunting on Frigate Bird Islet.”

“He had a son called Isaac,” Araipu went on, paying me not the slightest

attention; “and when Abraham was an old man, and had learned how foolish it was to worship the sun, he agreed to sacrifice Isaac to Jehovah. Then the Lord was very pleased, and gave Abraham great power. Abraham could command the east wind, ‘Blow from the north!’ and the east wind would switch round to the north. Or Abraham could command the hurricane, ‘Stop blowing!’ or ‘Blow easy!’ and the hurricane would stop blowing or blow easy. You see, he got all his power because he stopped worshiping the sun and started worshiping the True God instead.”

A hundred yards from the station Bone’s daughter Strange-Eyes was bathing at the back of her house without any clothes or shelter. So naturally I stared at her. Pretty soon Araipu found he had lost my attention. Turning his head, he saw Strange-Eyes in a lather of soapsuds.

“Hm!” the vicar muttered, and shook his head meditatively for a little time; then, brightening, “David was of the seed of Abraham,” he said.

Tentatively I mentioned that David had seen a beautiful maiden bathing.

“Yes, of course,” Araipu interrupted quickly; “that was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” Then he started telling how David had sent Uriah into the front of battle so he should be killed; but again I interrupted, this time to suggest our immediate departure for Frigate Bird.

Araipu vaguely consented, as though he would of course go with me to the islet, but the sail four miles across the lagoon would be only incidental to a flowing comment on the seed of Abraham, which apparently he would talk about for the next few days, oblivious betimes to all else in the physical world.

I told my old cook Mama I was going. Then we launched Araipu’s canoe and brought it round to the trading station. We stepped the mast and took aboard a basket of provisions as well as a pound of twist tobacco for the Leeward villagers, who were temporarily living on the islet. When our sail was set and we had moved a few yards from the beach there was a great screaming ashore. We saw old Bosun-woman dashing down the beach, a basket of taro on her head, a bundle of clothes in her hands. We dug our paddles in the sandy bottom to hold back the canoe and waited for her to wade out.

“The taro is for Pilala-woman!” she screamed, her lips within an inch of my ear. “The clothes are for Bones!”

“Better come along with us,” I suggested ironically.

“Whee-ee!” she screamed—the Puka-Pukan ejaculation. “Me go to Frigate Bird! I’ve never been there once!”

Think of it! A woman living on this island for some seventy years and never visited Frigate Bird Islet, four miles across the lagoon! It reminds me of a pair of darling old maids who lived near our ranch in the foothills of California. They were in their forties, alone on a farm only a few miles from Fresno, the lights of which place they could see, on a clear night, from a hill beyond their house—yet they had never been to Fresno nor to any city! Once I

tried to take them, and I remember that one old dear couldn't go because she had a hen setting and her sister was "no hand at poultries"; the other one couldn't go because she was afraid to leave her sister alone—"something might happen." So it is with lots of Puka-Pukans. We have only three islets on this reef, yet many of the neighbors have set foot on only one.

Well, it must be otherwise with the coming generation, for while Bosun-woman was screaming at us a half-dozen urchins, aged three to seven, came charging down the beach, splashed out to our canoe, and, naked and without luggage, tumbled aboard. God knows whose children they were.

"Where are you going?" I asked like a silly white man.

"I dunno," a squint-eyed Tartar replied. "Where you going?"

"We are going to Frigate Bird Islet."

"That suits me," said the hoyden, and apparently the others concurred, for they didn't even discuss the matter. Picking up paddles or using their hands, they sent the canoe scudding out of the lee of the land.

Lucky we were to have those extra hands, for presently we saw coming down the beach the rest of the gang, about fifty strong—and their noise was like the yelping of a pack of coyotes, I pulled in the sheet, we dug our paddles in the water, and escaped by the skin of our teeth. Dozens of the urchins plunged in the bay and tried to overtake us, but, what with our half-dozen wild man-eating sailors, we managed to escape.

That's the way with the Puka-Pukan toddlers. They run over this island like a vandal horde controlled, I'll swear, by a sort of group impulse. Perhaps a few of the women know to whom certain toddlers belong; it is even possible that fathers can isolate their own brats and name them. Araipu was pretty certain of the names of two of our sailors, but he admitted that he was better versed in the seed of Abraham than in the seed of his neighbors.

Soon the wind took hold of our sail; we dodged about the coral beads, scudded through a crooked passage leading to the lagoon, and drove like a racing yacht—faster than a racing yacht—toward Frigate Bird Islet, the urchins whooping so loudly that Araipu didn't have half a chance to get a word in edgewise about Abraham. Within thirty minutes we had nosed the canoe's bow into the beach of the far islet.

Four and a half seconds before the canoe touched the shore six naked toddlers described six graceless parabolas in six different directions. Some landed like spiders—all arms and legs—in the water; one or two landed on the beach; but, wheresoever they landed, within another four and a half seconds not a single one was in sight. For a little space we could hear them yelling as they plundered land crabs, coconuts, mummy apples—or as they flung stones at fledglings, terns, boobies. Presently they would be breaking the law by broiling young birds and gorging themselves with burnt flesh and coconuts.

Constable Ears, who alone met us, eyed with displeasure the streaks of brown skin cutting across the beach and into the bush. "They should not have come to our islet," he said severely; then he scowled, raised his eyebrows in a

manner almost sanctimonious, and approached to shake hands with Araipu and me.

The constable is tall, long-faced, very very serious in all things, and given to long silences before replying to the simplest questions. If one asks him, "When do we eat?" or "Will it rain?" or "What do you think of the universe" Ears will knit his brow, gaze meditatively nowhere, cock his head to one side, and, after a full moment of silence, reply gravely: "Now," or "Perhaps," or "I think it is a good thing."

Not another soul was in sight. This annoyed me, for usually when I go to Frigate Bird Islet the young men run into the shoal water, pick up my canoe with me in it, and carry it ashore. Being accustomed to this kind of a welcome, I was peeved when only the constable met us; in fact I was on the point of stepping the mast in the other end of the canoe and returning to the main islet. I said as much to Araipu; but Ears, overhearing me, assured me that the inhabitants would be overjoyed at my coming, but just now they were playing cricket, so of course they could not welcome me with songs, dances, wreaths of gardenias, and welcoming orations.

I should have understood this at once, but for some reason my pride was hurt. In a huff I walked through the deserted copra makers' village, following the sound of whoops, groans, and guffaws; and presently, in a little clearing, I came upon the hundred and fifty people of Leeward Village, playing or watching a studied game of cricket. Two or three men glanced at me in a vaguely preoccupied way, then jerked their heads around to watch the game. Happy-go-lucky old Tapiapi, his eyes shifting between me and the players, explained hurriedly that for six hours they had been playing to decide which half of the village should gather coconuts tomorrow for the other half. I then realized that if the British Navy were target practicing in the offing no one would leave the game. Like children that can play for two hours but cannot work for two minutes, these atoll people can play cricket all day to determine who shall work an hour tomorrow. I mentioned as much to Tapiapi. He knitted his brow, pondered my words, and finally opined that it would be hard work gathering coconuts tomorrow, for the people would be stiff and tired from the cricket game.

Presently I went to the parson's house, and there I found Araipu telling Ears about the seed of Abraham, while betimes the constable scowled and nodded his head gravely.

"You see those coconut trees," the vicar was saying, pointing through the open side of the house to where straight rows of young trees stretched seaward. "All those trees to the right are bearing nuts, and all the trees to the left are barren."

"Maybe it would be a good idea to drive some spikes in the barren ones," I suggested. "The rusty iron sometimes makes them bear."

Araipu eyed me severely and mumbled something about driving spikes into Sarah; then I divined that I had broken into a carefully planned metaphor,

so I held my peace.

“Yes, they are barren,” the constable said. “And yet the fruitful trees and the barren trees were planted at the same time. They are twenty-four years old.”

“It may be many years before they bear,” the vicar said. “They may not bear until they are ninety years old... . You needn’t snicker, Ropati. If you read your Bible you would know that Sarah laughed when the Lord told her she would have a child in her old age—but she had one just the same. That was Isaac, the half brother of Ishmael. He married Rebekah and had two sons by her, Esau and Jacob ...”

“The game’s finished!” Ears exclaimed suddenly, jumping to his feet. “My half of the village has won!”

“How do you know?”

“Can’t you hear them?”

“I can hear only a noise like a massacre of the seed of Abraham,” I replied; then, as Araipu beamed on me, I watched the constable dash toward the cricket ground, his long legs and arms swinging, his head thrust forward. A moment later the vicar and I followed with the leisurely dignity befitting strangers. We arrived just in time to see the grand ceremony of “insulting the losers.”

At the far side of the clearing stood the winners in attitudes of Roman conquerors, while under the trees, in groups hushed and expectant, sat the entire remaining population, including, of course, the losers. First-Born moved to the front of the winning team, squatted on the ground, and rattled off a dance rhythm with a pair of sticks on his homemade cricket bat; then the important young man, Luluia, walked mincingly, affecting timidity, to the center of the glade. The dance tempo became more rapid, and Luluia, flinging out his arms, seemed with the same gesture to fling away his timidity. With brazen effrontery he went through contortions that I shall call “dancing” for lack of a better word. It was utterly obscene and insulting—and was enjoyed by winners and losers alike.

After the first “dance” Luluia walked back and forth between the wickets, shouting, “Aha! ... I? ... Who am I?” He paused to laugh in a way that reminded me of a villain in a cheap melodrama. “I? ... Who am I? ... Ask the losers ... Ask the winners ... Ask the frigate birds that roost in the hernandia trees ... Ask the fish in the sea! Who am I? ... I am Lu-lu-i-a!” Here he made an awful noise, something between a bellow and a shriek, then continued: “I am Lu-lu-i-a! I am the man that made the most runs today! I am the man that blackened the faces of the losers! I am Lu-lu-i-a! ... Yip! ... Wow! ... Whoop!” and with that the cricket-bat drum sounded again, while the champion—oh well, he “danced.”

Presently the people returned to their village, two hundred paces away, but Araipu held me back. “Give them time,” he whispered. “They will want to greet us in a becoming manner, like the sons of Jacob were greeted by Joseph

the second time they went into Egypt.”

“We’ll walk this way and come up to the village from the lagoon beach.”

And so we did, Araipu betimes giving me some further details concerning Joseph’s brethren.

We found every last villager awaiting us, and every one of them in an awkward, expectant attitude. They stood in groups, as though they had casually met, were passing the time of day, and had not the foggiest idea that Ropati himself had arrived with no less a person than the vicar. When we were close to them they glanced up suddenly, as though at a prearranged signal, and, “Hello!” they exclaimed. “It is Ropati! It is Araipu!” Their faces wreathed in smiles, they rushed forward, relieved from the anticipatory waiting, hands outstretched.

“When the King of Israel visited the Pharaoh of Egypt,” the vicar cried, “he sent his spokesman before him, bearing presents for Pharaoh—jars of honey, spices, gems, frankincense, and myrrh. Thus he softened the heart of Pharaoh. . . . Now Ropati has come to your islet to hunt sea birds with the young men of your village, and he has sent me, his spokesman, before him, bearing this pound of Lord Beaconsfield Twist Tobacco so that your hearts may be softened toward him.”

Araipu then handed the package of twist to the “supercargo” of Leeward Village, and Immediately we turned to hurry away. As we left the village we could hear the supercargo shouting:

“Gather by the House of Youth! The old men! The first-born! The deacons! The fathers! The youths! the naked ones! Gather by the House of Youth! We are dividing a pound of Lord Beaconsfield Twist Tobacco presented by the King of Israel to the Pharaoh of Egypt!”

There were whoops of laughter, and bellows of delight from tobacco-hungry old men; then the atoll jungle deadened the sound. We moved inland, following a crooked path; the branches of cordia and hernandia trees met overhead, and above them interlaced the fronds of coconut palms; below was an undergrowth of bird’s-nest ferns, magnolia bushes, pipturus, and pandanus, walling us in.

Presently we entered the clearing where Leeward Village’s lime tree grows, then moved on to the outer beach and followed it to Pilato the androgyne’s Place of Love. The Place was deserted; it seemed almost drab in the afternoon sunlight; it would waken to life and beauty when the moonlight slanted across the magnolia bushes, gleamed on the white coral sand, and the dancers were there. Leaving the Place, we walked around the islet’s west point and returned by an inland path. It was night by then, but the moon lighted our way. Araipu left me, to follow the lagoon beach to the parson’s house, while I wandered among the houses, wondering if I could escape the vicar and spend the night in the House of Youth. I decided I couldn’t, so I turned toward the community house, in the center of the village, and, crawling in, stretched out on a heap of logs used as seats by the Village Fathers.

I could see the copra makers' huts lit up fitfully by tiny fires. Each open-sided hut had a sleeping platform raised a foot or two off the ground. They looked like the counters in a shooting gallery or a hoopla concession. No; they were platforms in the cages of a zoo. Over yonder sat gorilla-like Bones, staring sullenly out of the open side of his house, firelight from coconut shells flashing on his huge and hairy face. And there was lion-maned King-of-the-Sky, recumbent on his platform, a veritable Lion of Lucerne. And there was old Mr. Scratch, a baboon if ever there was one. The hippopotamus-like Sacred Maid moved sluggishly about the Great House of King Toka, while shrew-like, Pilala-woman, in her cage to seaward, screamed at the passers-by; and close to the community house, in the House of Youth, a dozen monkey boys chattered and laughed and ogled the monkey girls in the adjoining House of Young Women.

One of the youths left the house to dive into the community house and alight beside me, on hands and knees, his face within a few inches of mine. "Come to the House of Youth tomorrow night," Ropati," he whispered. "After the bird hunting, when the south reef is dry, the girls of Ko Islet will come to our Place of Love!"

Then he was gone, a shadow blown through the fitful night. I thought of little auburn-haired Desire and wondered if she would be among those who crossed the south reef at low tide.

Then I felt incapable of thinking of anything, even of Desire, for I was at peace with the whole world. Everything was good: the lions and monkeys, the sound of surf beating on the outer reef, the smell of grilling fish. The light puffs of wind were just cool enough to add to my feeling of well-being. There were no mosquitoes. The voices of the villagers did not come in the usual undisciplined screams, or, if they did, I did not mind it. My nerves were asleep. When I rolled a cigarette and smoked it slowly the tobacco tasted fragrant, mellow, delicious. The flashing fires, which usually hurt my eyes, now had a lulling effect. The hard logs beneath me, pressing into my back, my head, my legs, only added to my sensuous enjoyment.

A little girl of about four years came toddling along the road, crawled into the community house, stared at me for a little space, and then cuddled close beside me. She seemed as happy as I. She did not find it necessary to speak; she simply lay by me, communing with me in spirit. Then the toddler snuggled closer; then she threw her little body across me and almost instantly fell asleep.

Now that I could not courteously or conveniently rise and leave, I should have felt ill at ease; but through some rational quirk of the brain I continued to feel at peace with the world. I appreciated the pretty confidence of this child. I felt her to be an old friend who had come to me for security and sleep. I was nearly asleep myself when Constable Ears stalked past the Great House and, stopping by the House of Youth, asked my whereabouts. Having been told, he came to the community house and called my name.

“Yes.”

Ears cleared his throat, nodded thoughtfully for a full minute, then told me that a feast had been prepared and was awaiting me in the parson’s house.

“All right,” I replied. “I will come when I can find someplace to put this child.”

“Child, you said? What child? Whose child?”

“Take her to her mama,” I added. “She is lying on top of me.”

With a good deal of diffidence Ears crawled under the eaves. When he was close I grasped his hand and laid it on the toddler.

“Oh!” he muttered. “It’s a baby!” Then gruffly, affecting anger, he shouted: “Here’s a child! Here’s somebody’s brat annoying Ropati! Whose brat is this? Has anybody lost a child?”

“Bring it to the fire!” Pilala-woman screamed.

Ears carried the child to the shrew’s fire and leaned over so the light was on the child’s face. Then he straightened up, and, in an apologetic tone, “Oh! I see it’s mine!” he muttered. “Hey! Woman! Come here, woman! Take away the brat!”

“I hope you’re not annoyed,” I said when the constable had returned.

“Oh no,” he muttered in an absent-minded way. “But I came here to tell you something, and now I’ve forgotten it.”

“Food?” I queried.

“Ah yes, that’s it! You are to feast at the parson’s house.”

Araipu and I had expected to rough it in the South Seas, but the villagers had thought differently. When we had left to watch the insulting of the losers the house had been empty, for the parson himself was on the main islet. Now it was furnished. Mats covered the coral-gravel floor; there were pillows whose slips were embroidered with all the flowers of the field and the flags of the nations; there were patchwork quilts; a lantern swung, flickered, and smoked from one of the tirbeams, and spread under the eaves was a picnic for a gourmand.

The villagers were aware that they had served us well. They told us about it. The dancer Luluia gave a before-dinner speech in which he modestly omitted mentioning himself but spoke instead of the generosity of his village.

“When the King of Israel visited the Pharaoh of Egypt,” Luluia shouted, “Pharaoh set before him all the choice delicacies of his realm! Here is food for the King of Israel and his spokesman the Vicar Araipu! Here is coconut sauce! Here are drinking nuts! Here are grilled sea birds, lobsters, and fish! Here are taros, bananas, utos, mummy apples! Here is a basin of water, and smell soap, and a towel! When you have feasted you can wash your hands, then lie back on our mats, with our lantern lighting your house; and you can smoke and gossip until our maidens come to sing you to sleep!”

There being a vicar among us, Luluia then gave a few short and snappy

texts. Araipu replied with some appropriate remarks about manna in the wilderness, and we fell to.

The people left while we were picnicking. When we had eaten our fill we gathered the remnants in frond food mats and hung them to the tie beams; then we lay down to cigarettes and sleep.

Some toddlers came to the house during the night to sleep here, there, or most anyplace—or, better, they went to sleep here, rolled about the house from here to there, and woke up in the morning most anyplace. A strong wind came up; the coconut trees beat their wings against the sky; but in the morning Araipu woke me with a cheerful, “The sun is up, Ropati! Did I tell you that the sun was the God of Abraham?” and then he kept doggedly on the ancient Hebrew genealogies until we had finished our breakfast and I had escaped from him.

“The young men! The tree climbers! The bird hunters! Gather at the Point of Hernandia Trees tonight! The King of Israel and the Pharaoh of Egypt will go a-hunting tonight! Gather at the Point of Hernandia Trees! The young men! The tree climbers! The bird hunters!”

At sundown thirty of us walked from the copra makers’ village to the western point, where for a little space we lay on the beach between the wall of hernandia trees and the shallows. The great combers rolling across the barrier reef, a hundred yards away, thundered mightily, but they did not drown the lonely cries of the thousands of boobies, terns, and frigate birds circling over us, flock above flock, until they were lost in the confused cloud masses that streaked and blotched the sky.

“The birds are roosting,” someone said; then, later: “Look—the tops of the trees are black with them!”

They were a strange sight, belonging to the world of demonology. Lying on the beach, with my binocular to my eyes, I could see on the topmost branches of the hernandia trees crowds of boobies, frigate birds, and terns. The frigate birds were seizing the places of honor. Often one would flap down to a twig where a booby was roosting and make a great to-do until he had frightened the booby away and taken the perch for himself. Black, long-beaked, evil-eyed, the frigate birds stared this way and that, stretched their necks and spread their wings as though to straighten out the kinks. Above the roosting birds thousands of others circled and squawked in a note both lonely and petulant. Seeing them roost so high, I wondered how the men could climb to them.

I turned my eyes from the birds to see, in the now dim evening light, a dozen naked boys squatting on the sand. They had come from nowhere, without sound; they had been materialized out of the spirit of this desolate place. With mouths open slightly, bodies motionless, they stared fixedly at the roosting birds. I fancied them mischievous idols squatting on the sand, and

when I turned my eyes back to the wall of hernandia trees I fancied the birds were malevolent pagan idols perching in the trees.

A mosquito buzzed in my ear. I slapped.

“What’s that?” came First-Born’s voice from behind me.

“Mosquitoes.”

“Mosquitoes!” First-Born cried in a note of indignation. “That’s impossible. There are no mosquitoes on Frigate Bird Islet!” The last words had been said dogmatically, brooking no contradiction; but I replied nevertheless that one had buzzed in my ear and that now I could feel one biting my ankle.

First-Born laughed sardonically. “Oh,” he muttered, “perhaps just now, at dusk, with a moon, on the beach,” and then, raising his voice, “but there are no mosquitoes on Frigate Bird Islet!”

“Mosquitoes?” Constable Ears called from the group of bird hunters.

“Hm! Mosquitoes, you said?”

“Ropati says there are mosquitoes on Frigate Bird Islet!”

Everyone had a good laugh over that, for one of their pet delusions, actuated by village patriotism, is that there are no mosquitoes on Frigate Bird Islet—though the other (and inferior) islets are swarming with them. If you swat a mosquito and hold its carcass before their eyes the villagers will dismiss the evidence with contempt. “Oh, one or two, perhaps, just at this time, with the moon nearly full,” they will admit, “but there are no mosquitoes on Frigate Bird Islet.”

“It will be another hour before the moon is high enough to light the bird hunters,” someone said presently.

“The moon is under the ridgepole of the sky,” First-Born said. “Where’s Araipu? You pray for us, Araipu.”

When we had gathered close to the vicar and lowered our heads he told his Creator all about the hunting party, mentioning that we were good Christians, had paid our church dues, and never missed a service. He asked that no youths fall from the trees and kill themselves like the heathen youths had done in days gone by, and he asked that enough “quails be sent” to support our bodies in the wilderness. He prayed for a long time, and though the prayer turned out to be more of a sermon about Moses and the Exodus than a supplication, had he not raised his voice to Heaven for at least ten minutes no one of the hunters would have dared climb the trees.

We rose. First-Born grasped my arm while the ape-man Poaza walked a few paces ahead and the others straggled up the beach to disappear instantly in the deep black of the hernandia grove.

Despite the moon it was very dark indeed in the grove. We could scarcely see a man standing an arm’s length away; and the air, heavy with the miasma of bird droppings and decayed vegetation, seemed to quiver when great seas

pounded along the barrier reef. We separated in eight or ten groups without my knowing we had separated, for the natives moved through the grove as silently as shadows. Presently I heard First-Born's voice:

"There goes Poaza!"

"Where?"

First-Born grasped my arm, pulled me close to him, and pointed upward. By stooping a little and pressing my cheek against his shoulder I could glance along his outstretched arm and see, high up against the background of checkered leaves and sky, something moving. Then I fixed my binocular on the object and guessed, if not saw, that it was a man. He must have been one hundred feet above us. I lost sight of him when he crawled into a mass of foliage, but later I saw him again, always higher and higher up.

"No money in the world could make me climb one of these trees at night," I said to First-Born. "The Puka-Pukan youths are cowboys!"

"That's right; they are cowboys," First-Born agreed, cowboy being a local appellation for a bold and reckless fellow. "I myself am probably the best bird hunter on this island—but tonight I have a sore foot, so I can't climb."

"How do they get up the straight, slippery trees? The trunks must be ten feet around, and there's not a limb till you get fifty feet up."

First-Born did not reply, for just then there was a great squawking high over our heads: "Naw-ah! Ngaw-ah!" choked off suddenly. Then we heard the crackling sound of a bird falling through foliage and a loud thud as it struck the ground. First-Born groped forward to hunt for the bird but told me to stay where I was.

Throughout the grove boobies were squawking and dead bodies thumping to the ground. Sometimes a matchlight would pierce a red hole in the umbra; whispered voices moved like ghostly presences about me; and once I heard Araipu intoning, startlingly loud, seemingly from nowhere: "*And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp ...*" Numbers II: 31." In a half hour the rain of birds had lessened. I found First-Born close to me again.

"Would you dare walk here alone at night?" I asked.

"I should die of fear."

"Why?"

"Ghosts, Ropati, ghosts."

"Have you ever seen a ghost?"

"No, and I never want to."

"If you had seen one you might not be so frightened. They are harmless."

"Ropati, have you ever seen a ghost?"

"Many times," I replied. "I saw one in this grove, some years ago, when I was walking round the islet on the lookout for turtles."

First-Born edged away from me as though frightened of a man who had seen a ghost; then he moved still farther away, to pick up another bird; but soon he hurried back, more afraid of ghosts than of a man who had seen a

ghost.

“I wish you would talk about something else,” he said crossly. “It’s dangerous to talk about such things out here at night in the hernandia grove. Ghosts often come snooping around when you are talking about them— and Poaza might hear you! If he gets thinking about ghosts all the strength will go out of him and he will fall out of the tree!”

But presently Poaza himself appeared. We felt our way to the edge of the grove, then walked a little way down the beach to where the rest of the bird hunters were gathered. We had seven boobies; the entire catch numbered sixty-one, which was exceptionally good. It represented a feast for the entire village, wing feathers enough to decorate all the hats, wing bones enough to make popguns for all the children, and, most important of all, enough birds to make the Central and Windward villages green with envy.

“I shall preach about it next Sunday,” Araipu said as we trod the gleaming sand back to the copra makers’ village; and then, his head thrown back, he shouted to the moon:

“‘He spread a cloud for a covering; and fire to give light in the night.

“‘The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.

“‘He opened the rock, and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river.

“‘For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham his servant.’

Psalm 105: 39, 40, 41, 42.”

At the copra makers’ village I left Araipu and entered the House of Youth.

Chapter II

I CLIMBED to one of the sleeping platforms that extend across the tie beams at either gable end of the House of Youth and stretched out beside the young men of Leeward Village.

I breathed deeply of the heavy, satisfying smell of human bodies mingled with the fragrance of flower-scented coconut oil, the slightly dank yet appetizing smell of newly opened native ovens, smoke impregnated with the odor of damp thatch, all of which combined to suggest a sense of security, shelter, sustenance. And at times, when a gust of wind swooped down from the treetops to pass through the House of Youth and eddy above the sleeping platform, the fragrance of jungle flowers, reef mist, and the sea would envelop me.

Coconut-shell fires flashed here and there in the village, and a fire of coconut spathes burned between the Great House of King Toka and that of the gorilla Bones. Their vagrant gleams moved across the thatching in the House of Youth and were diffused onto the sleeping platform.

Slung to the ridgepole above me I could see a bundle of fish poles with their lines of pipturus bark and their gleaming pearl-shell hooks. Water containers made from whole coconuts, in nets of sennit, with stoppers of wood in their eyes, hung like gourds from the rafters; and stuck into the thatch or tied to the rafters by strips of bark were coconut-meat scrapers, rolls of sennit, great wooden ruvettus hooks a handsbreadth from barb to bend, many faded wreaths of fern leaves—memory presents from the girls of Windward Village.

Next to me lay crooked-legged little Bribery, Jr., only son of crooked-legged Deacon Bribery. Beyond was the big youth Eagle-wing, the bosom friends Messrs. Achilles and Ajax, and the small but active Mr. Horse. The six of us fitted snugly on the narrow platform, shoulder to shoulder and hip to hip. On the other gable-end platform lay another group of youths, while below us, on the ground floor of thick, roughhewn planks, were a dozen others—Mr. Boston, Mr. Coconut, Jack Dempsey, Mr. Casanova. These fraternity names are never used in the unromantic daylight, when among their elders.

Though it was nearly midnight the village was awake. Women gossiped as they cleaned and broiled the night's catch of birds; a group of old men shouted advice and encouragement to King Toka and Bones, who were playing a disk-tossing game by the light of a spathe fire; children screamed as they splashed in the lagoon; from near by in the village I heard the cracked voice of old Mr. Scratch intoning a Christian prayer before stretching out to sleep; there was singing and laughter from the House of Young Women, but this last sounded to me insincere. I wondered if they knew and resented that

the girls of Ko were to cross the reef tonight.

“What a contrast in cultures!” I thought. “These people do not know whether they are pagan or Christian. Here in the House of Youth I am virtually in ancient PukaPuka; but over on the main islet, or even on this islet in the daytime, I am in Christianized Danger Island. The people seem to slip back to pagan times with the setting of the sun ... I wish it were always night.”

“Tst!” came suddenly from little Bribery, and at the same instant, from a house across the road, a woman started screaming.

There was the sound of running footsteps.

“Wake up, Pilala-woman!” someone cried. “Why are you screaming?”

“She has had a bad dream!”

“The spirits of the underworld are tormenting her!”

“No; it is her old husband! He comes from his grave every night to haunt her!”

For some time the screaming continued, unsuppressed, in a note of panic terror; then Pilala-woman’s voice: “It was a devil from the underworld! He was raping me! Oh! his thing was as hot as a firebrand!”

Then another voice: “That might be a good dream! Perhaps you are pregnant!”

“No; it foretells death!” a quavering old voice declared.

“It was a bad dream!” wailed Pilala-woman. “I know I have conceived a devil-baby! It will kill me when it drops! Aue-ue! I shall die. I shall make my grave-skirt! I shall die!”

Mr. Horse, in the House of Youth, laughed aloud.

“Who laughed?” screamed Pilala-woman. “May Satan eat his ears! It was one of those fledglings in the House of Youth! May his thing hang like a wilted leaf!”

And then, gradually, the village was quiet again.

“We must leave soon,” Eagle-wing said. “The tide is out; the south reef is dry.”

“Desire will come tonight. She was made into a woman yesterday. She will lead the dance.”

“Ropati will take Desire.”

“If only I could!”

“Oh, she loves you, for you have a chest full of smell soap and talcum powder and firecrackers and hair oil ... and you can pay her fine every time the resident agent arrests her.”

“Why does Horatio Augustus put us in jail? Is it sinful to love our girls? Why does he do it?”

“Because he is a fool!”

“Come! Pilato will be waiting for us. Bring your cocolele, Mr. Horse: the little mice squeal when they hear it.”

“Perhaps the little mice are at our Place of Love now!”

“They will laugh at us if we keep them waiting!”

“They will say our women kept us in the village!”

We lowered ourselves from the sleeping platform and moved to the road. Mr. Horse struck some chords on his cocolele, and one of the Village Fathers, hearing him, shouted, “Where are you going, wild youths?” And we replied: “We go to our women in the Place of Love!”

“Go; and may luck go with you!”

Pilato’s Place of Love stands in a clearing by the outer beach. It is no more than an open-sided hut where the young unmarried take shelter from the rain; but it is said that the sandy beach stretching from the Place to the shallows had been cleared in pagan days by Goddess Taua for the dances of the youths and maidens; the densely leaved magnolia bushes lining the beach as far as the Point of Hernandia Trees had been planted by the goddess so that lovers should have privacy; and the deep pool between the beach and the reef had been scooped out by Taua so that hot bodies could be cooled in the foam-mottled, constantly renewed water.

Tonight we from the House of Youth, standing back in the shadows, saw Pilato move mincingly from his hut, his wide, feminine hips swinging under their bushy grass skirt, a song on his lips. For a little while he stared down the beach and along the moonlit coral highway to Ko; then, seeing a group of figures, “Tangi!” he called.

“Aye!” came the laughing voice of Desire’s elder sister. She stepped into the clearing, followed by pretty little auburn-haired Desire and a score of girls from Ko Islet. In one hand she carried a smoldering segment of coconut husk, in the other hand a frond basket. “I have brought you some periwinkles,” she said to Pilato. “Desire will cook them.”

With that she put the smoldering husk and the basket on the sand near the hut. Desire laid a coconut spathe on the husk and blew it to a blaze, then piled coconut shells on top of it. In a few moments the shells had burned to a bed of coal, and on this she laid the periwinkles. When the juice sizzled in the shells she picked them from the coals and shook out their meat on a food mat of frond leaves.

“You will lead the dance tonight,” Pilato told Desire when he had squatted by her and was eating the periwinkles. “And now that you are a woman you can choose any boy you wish.” Then he laughed spontaneously, threw back his head, joggled his shoulders, and sang:

“The back of the rat goes up and down!

Toko toi toi, toko toko to!

Toko toi toi, toko toko to!”

“Mr. Horse will be the little rat!” one of the girls cried.

“No; it will be Mr. Achilles or his friend Mr. Ajax. How they stare at her when she works in the taro bed!”

Desire shrugged her shoulders in a contemptuous way. "I shall have a cowboy for my husband!" she said.

"*Te witoki* [The impudence]!" screamed a chorus of voices.

Then we from the House of Youth moved into the glade. Pilato brought out his huge wooden gong and, squatting by it, beat out a rapid tattoo, and then, with the high-pitched voice of a woman, he called the first movement of the dance.

Now moonlight glistened on the white coral sand, cast moving lights and shadows among the metallic-green fronds. The magnolia leaves became tarnished silver, gleaming dully. Combers rumbled over the barrier reef, and across the shallows parallel ridges of water, their crests foaming, raced hissing shoreward, where they broke and surged up the beach, jangling the coral gravel.

Louder than the thunder of breakers and the jangle of coral gravel came the tattoo of Pilato's gong. He squatted by his gong to beat it in a kind of frenzy. His body was never at rest, his eyes sparkled; there were laughter, shouts of encouragement, and snatches of song from his lips. In the clearing before him the girls of Ko danced, formed in a double line, their arms and their hips moving in a manner that suggested physical love. We from the House of Youth stood here and there close to the dancers; but now and again one of us would leap forward, shouting in a spontaneous burst of excitement, and dance between the lines of girls, arms outstretched, knees knocking together, shoulders swaying. There would be screams from the girls, a shriek of laughter from Pilato, and hoarse shouts from the youths.

The moonlight played on the naked brown skins; it seemed to caress the shimmering black hair, the firm young breasts half hidden under wreaths of flowers; it played wantonly in the grass skirts and then moved on to project a nether dance, elongated and fantastic, across the sand until it was lost in the shadows. The moonlight was an actor in this scene of pagan loveliness, as was the wind with its tantalizing smell of hot bodies, of the night breath of wilting flowers.

Desire led the dance, as was her right, for she had been declared mature on the day before, and this was her night of glory. There were wreaths of cordia and pandanus blossoms around her head, flowers in her hair and behind her ears. Her grass skirt had been made by Tangi from the whitest of bleached fiscus bark; it was so bushy that it accentuated the width of her hips and their movement in the dance. Her breasts were bare, to me they were soft, round, inviting. With her mind on the movements of the dance, a little scowl puckering her brow and the bridge of her nose, she danced as though she were a priestess officiating in her temple—as perhaps she was.

Dawn was at hand when the dancing had ended. We strolled southward along the beach, and I so managed it that I was close to Desire and soon had my arm over her shoulders.

"I am coming for you, Desire," I said when we had reached the place

where our friends must turn onto the reef highway. "Wait for me when the moon is full."

Then I felt her arm slip around my waist and her hand press me gently, and then she was gone. For a little while we watched our friends move in single file along the reef, and we could hear the splash of their bare feet, for the tide was coming in. They were lost when the moon sank behind a bank of horizon clouds.

Suddenly tired to exhaustion we walked back to the copra makers' village.

At sundown I sent for Pio—the Mr. Horse of the House of Youth. I fed him bully beef and biscuits to make him strong at the paddle; and at deep dusk, after expressing the proper excuses to Araipu (and borrowing his canoe), we set off. It was night by the time we had paddled the mile to Matauea Point, on the westward side of Ko Islet. From there we skirted far out in the big horseshoe bay, so as to be safe from prying eyes, and paddled noiselessly.

There was a full moon. Soon I laid my paddle in the canoe and, sitting in the bow, stared into the water. In the shallow places the white sand bottom was of the light blue of a clear summer sky, with here and there growths of coral, shadowy fish moving among the coral forests. Elsewhere the water changed to deeper shades, to violet and purple and blue-black. Then presently we came to where the sand gave way to coral mountains as weird, as gloomy, as mysterious as the mountains in a book of fairy tales.

"Sh!" came suddenly from Pio. He backed water silently. "There's a *malau* fisherman!"

I soon made him out. Leaning low, we turned the canoe and paddled farther out in the bay, but only to find ourselves in a maze of reefs, scarcely awash, over some of which we had to drag the canoe. And the farther we paddled the closer the *malau* fisherman seemed to be. We soon guessed that he was following us so he could have a sauce of scandal to serve with his *malau*. And sure enough, when we were wedged in a great mass of reefs, each one of which was so thickly covered with spiny coral that we could not pull the canoe over it, the fisherman managed to come within recognizing distance.

"Ha, ha! Ropati and Pio!" the cur whooped.

Everyone knows how sound carries over calm water. Though the head of the bay was nearly a mile away, the villagers could hear every word the fisherman shouted.

"Oh, it's you, Bribery," I snarled, recognizing the crooked-legged deacon. "We're going to the main islet. Show us the way out of this mess."

"Aye, little Ropati; presently, Ropati dear!" the creature whined. "But how is it that you, who have lived on PukaPuka all these years, do not know the way to the main islet? And has Pio forgotten the way? And do you always use such nice-smelling hair oil when you are paddling to the islet?"

“Be still, you old fool! If you breathe another word you’ll never get any more tobacco from me!”

“Aye; the old man will be silent as the moon, little Ropati,” Bribery whooped. “Just give the old man a pinch of tobacco for his pipe, and he will be silent as the moon and show you the way out of these reefs.”

I gave him some tobacco; but instead of thanking me by speaking softly, he shrieked: “So Ropati and Pio are not going to the main islet at all! So they are out hunting little mice to play with tonight. . Oh, when I was a wild youth all the little mice—”

“Be still! No one cares about what happened when you were a wild youth! Show us the way out of here!”

Bribery’s reply was a cackling laugh that rent the still night air. I fancied scores of villagers poking their heads under the eaves of their houses, cocking their ears, glancing and nodding meaningfully at one another. Perhaps even Desire had heard us and was laughing at us! But presently, when the deacon had had his laugh and had shouted a number of other not very witty things, he noisily led us out of the maze.

We paddled to Matautu Point, which is directly across the bay from Matauea. There we hid our canoe under some pemphis bushes that hung over the shallow water, had a smoke, and, happy again, started toward the copra makers’ village of Ko. It was then that I began really to enjoy myself. I followed Pio, through the shadowy jungle, under long-leaved pandanus trees, through the gloom of hernandia groves. I listened as though for the first time to the distant thunder of combers on the barrier reef, the mournful cooing of island doves, the squawking of noddly terns a-roost in the coconut trees. The night noises were primitive music, and I was a primitive man out hunting for his woman.

Once we slipped inland to crouch behind a clump of bird’s-nest ferns, roll cigarettes, and light them where the flame of the match would not be seen in the village. Then we moved on again, cautiously now, till presently we saw a fire burning before the first village house. It was Mama Tala’s place, where Desire was staying.

When we were within a hundred paces of the house Pio grasped my arm, pointed, and whispered: “There she is! She is sitting close to the fire, with her back to a coconut tree. She and Tangi and her mother are eating coconut crabs Listen! Can’t you hear the old lady cracking the claws with her teeth?”

“I can see only a red glow in the darkness and hear only the terns squawking in the treetops.”

“Wait here,” Pio whispered. “I will slip through the shadows, and creep up behind her, and tell her you have come for her. Mama Tala must not know that I am here, for it is tapu for the Leeward villagers to come to Ko.”

I was about to tell him that Bribery would carry the news to the villagers if they did not know it now, but by then Pio was gone. I moved a few paces to the lagoon beach and sat there in the shadow of a cordia tree. Across the

narrow stretch of water at the head of the bay, I could see a score of fires creating out of darkness pictures of village life; a group of half-naked figures squatting round a cooking fire; an old man sitting with his back to a house post, oblivious to the present world as he dreamed of the past; children playing in firelit glades; the red glow on domes of foliage shaken fitfully in the breeze.

There was the steady rhythm of a gong from some place of love on the outer beach, merging and sometimes lost in the thunder of reef combers, the screams of children, the sustained murmur of the coconut fronds. There was the smell of broiling fish from a cookhouse near by in the village, the heavy odor of seaweed cast along the shore, and once a vagrant waft of scented coconut oil, and with it, in my mind's eye but seemingly as tangible as living flesh, the face of Desire. I drank in these sights, sounds, smells, and I felt myself a part of this world far away.

The night birds were flying seaward now. I could hear them squeak petulantly as they winged overhead. Terns soared down from their perches to wheel over the water before flying to the shallows; curlews piped their cry of panic loneliness. I could feel a lizard moving across my leg, and I knew the great lobsterlike coconut crabs were coming forth from their holes and hollow logs to climb the palms for their nightly plunder.

"Ropati!" Pio whispered in my ear. "Why are you sitting here as though in a dream? Desire will meet you on the Point of Teama. Tangi will be with her, for she is going to be my girl tonight. Give me your flashlight. I will lead them to the point. Come to us when you see the light."

Then Pio slipped away again, and a moment later I was picking my way inland through the groves and jungle. Coming to a trail that I recognized, I followed it to the outer beach and then walked along the hard sand by the edge of the shallows to the south point—the Point of Teama. Close by a clump of magnolia bushes I found a place to wait for Pio and Desire. The coral gravel was small enough to lie on comfortably, and I had a good view of the stretch of beach on either side and of the jungle barrier behind me.

It was a lonely place indeed—a lonely place to meet Desire! The wind had sprung up; now it blew over me caressingly. The magnolia bushes spread their gnarled and twisted branches over my head, rustled faintly and sibilantly like the distant buzz of night insects. A few paces away the ripples marched across the shallows to jingle the coral gravel with a tintinnabulation of tiny bells; there was not a human sound to jar on my ears. Across the shallows, in the sky above the eastern reef, a somber cloud had risen. It reminded me of a sitting Buddha. The full moon cast a dim shadow across it. It seemed to me that I was worshiping in an ancient temple where a candle burned before the idol of a pagan god. Then the beam of a flashlight played on me, and an instant later Pio and Desire were at my side. Back in the shadows I saw another figure and guessed it was Tangi.

I cannot tell a great deal of that night with Desire, for it was an experience of the spirit more than of the flesh. Though she was clothed only in a grass skirt, when she lay flung out by the magnolia bushes, the moonlight full upon her, I sat by her and stared at her, marveling that such a lovely creature should exist, that she should come to me in this lonely place, and that I might have her for the asking.

“Why did you come so stealthily?” Desire asked when she was lying close to me and Pio and Tangi had slipped away to some love nest of their own. “I heard you out in the lagoon. I knew you were coming for me, and I told my mother so.”

“What did she say?”

“She was willing. I have been a woman a whole week now, so my mother would not stop me going to the outer beach with you. Why didn’t you come openly and take me from my mother’s house?”

“I do not belong to your village. It is tapu for the Leeward villagers to come here.”

“Nothing is tapu for you: you are a white man.”

“Well, anyway, little one, it was fun meeting you this way.”

“Yes, I understand,” Desire said thoughtfully. “That is why I told Pio I would meet you on this point. I knew you wanted to creep through the jungle like a cowboy and meet me in the loneliest place in the world.”

Then she moved closer to me and laid her head on my arm. “You are one of the wild youths now,” she said. “Why don’t you take a new name, like the boys in the House of Youth—a name like Mr. Horse or Eagle-wing?”

“You think of one for me, Desire.”

“I have done it already. You told me you would come for me when the moon was full, and now you are with me alone for the first time, with the moonlight shining on us, so I am going to call you Mr. Moonlight.”

“That’s a nice name—and what is your name in the House of Young Women?”

“I am Miss Memory.”

“What a pretty name! Do you know what it means?”

“No, but I saw the word in a white man’s book, and when I spoke the word it sounded nice—memory!”

“I love you, Miss Memory.”

“And I love you, Mr. Moonlight ... Am I to be your woman now—forever?”

“That you are. When the villagers return to the main islet you must come each morning to the trading station. We will call you a housemaid so the resident agent will not arrest us; but old Mama will do the work while you stay close to me where I can see you and be happy.”

Then I leaned over her to kiss her in the white man’s way, and then to rub

my nose in her hair like the natives do; and then we lay back, arm in arm, under the magnolia bush, to talk of the things lovers talk about, which talk is nothing at all unless the lovers are there, and the feel of each other, and the moonlight, and the fragrance, and the sound of soft voices. So I shall leave myself under the magnolia bush with Memory until the dawn quickens, for it was then that I led her back to Mama Tala's house, and, in broad daylight, caring not a whit who saw me, paddled back to Frigate Bird Islet with Pio.

Chapter III

I HAVE BEEN BACK on the main islet for nearly a month, and I am writing in the Danger Island trading station. If anyone should find these scribbled pages among my worldly effects, when I have passed happily into the pagan underworld, and should wonder why I now speak of my atoll as Danger Island instead of Puka-Puka, let him understand that, to me, the modern name better fits the main islet with its three churches, its native store, its resident agent (a native of the Lower Islands), and its villagers clothed in ragged European clothes. The main islet is only four miles from Frigate Bird, yet in time I seem to leap from a primitive age to a mockery of civilization—from PukaPuka to Danger Island.

Here in the station the empty shelves are about me, with their ghosts of cheap print, butterfly scent, pipe knives, smell soap, marbles, lollipops, firecrackers; a few books are on the counter where formerly flowered muslin was cut in three-yard lengths, where Lord Beaconsfield Twist Tobacco was traded for coconuts, where beauful maidens leaned their elbows as they smiled at the Yankee trader. And it is the same counter where I piped off many a watch while drawing pay as a trader, and where William the Heathen and I discussed many a bottle of brew. I might call it a storied counter, and I might tell of the storied bar of the Line Islands Trading Company, the wreck of which is still in the other downstairs room. Sometimes I fancy I can smell the stale beer.

Desire comes to the trading station every day except Sundays to help Mama in the cookhouse, tidy the station, or simply be with me; but she returns in the evening to her mother's house in Windward Village, directly across the bay from the station. On Sundays I spend much of my time on the back balcony, watching her move from her house to the cookhouse or to the village road and thence to church; and in the latter eventuality I will hurry down to the trade room and wait for her, for she often calls before crossing the road to the great white mausoleum of the missionary society. Or I will watch her sitting with her sister Tangi under the cordia tree, by the beach, where she knows I can see her. Also, though we have all day to make dates, we have worked out a system of signals to add variety to our language of love. Thus a white cloth hung on the balcony railing means: "Tonight, when Constable Benny beats the curfew gong, I shall come for you."

I find that it adds zest to the adventure if I breathe not a word of it during the day but wait till she has left in the evening, then hang the cloth from the railing, knowing she will not see it until she leaves the road in Windward Village and turns lagoonward toward her mother's house; and I am on the balcony to watch her through my binocular—watch her appear from behind

Uka's house, raise her head, hesitate a moment as she stares at the signal cloth, then turn her head away demurely and hurry into her mother's house, her heart beating fast—or is it my heart?

When Benny beats the curfew gong I go to First-Born's house, where the deaf-mute Letter is waiting for me. Because he is blind at night I lead him to my canoe, place him in its bow, and put a paddle in his hands. When I thump the side of the canoe he paddles, while I steer, slowly and silently across the bay to a coral head near Windward Village beach. With the bow of the canoe on the coral I wait until a mass of wavy auburn hair seems to float across the calm water toward me. A brown hand reaches up to grasp the canoe's crossboom, Miss Memory boards us and whispers that the villagers are asleep and nighttime was made for us.

I am becoming rankly sentimental. Perhaps my head is still drunk with the adventure of last night. The time was moonrise, the place the lee of a magnolia bush on the outer beach, the company was Miss Memory, and of further company there was none.

In a frond basket I carried two thick albacore steaks, two drinking nuts, and some raw peeled taro. Memory carried balanced on her head a basket of coconut shells and a pair of food tongs made from an eighteen-inch piece of frond midrib. We needed nothing else—no salt, paper, lunch kit, thermos bottle, sweet pickles or sour—though in my pockets were matches, tobacco, a pipe, and a knife.

On the way to the outer beach I took my arm from Memory's shoulders long enough to pick up a couple of coconut spathes and to fray their ends so they would light readily. She stopped at a guettarda tree to pick a score of leaves and lay them on her basket of shells.

When we had decided on our magnolia bush I lighted the spathes and piled the coconut shells on top of them. The shells would burn with a white sputtering flame, and they would leave a bed of coals that smoldered for a half hour or more ... But I was not concerned. After kindling the fire I crawled under the magnolia bush, lighted my pipe, and watched my atoll girl as she laid the fish, the taro, the coconuts on the coals. Puffing away at the old pipe, grunting occasionally in the Puka-Pukan manner just to show that I was happy, I watched her turn the fish and the taro with her midrib tongs; I noted how charmingly her hair fell about her bare shoulders, how the glowing coals lent their spirit to play in her tresses. And now, mingled with my tobacco smoke, came the savory odor of fat that had oozed from the fish and was sputtering on the coals. My mouth watered so freely that soon a gurgling sound came from my pipe, so I knocked out the remnant of tobacco, blew the moisture out of the stem, and filled her up again.

My atoll girl laid out the leaves in a nice little circle close beside me so I could eat in the old Roman manner, accumbent; and I had scarcely finished my second pipe when she picked the fish and the taro from the coals with her tongs and laid them on the leaves. Then, protecting her hands with a mat of

leaves, she opened the coconuts by tapping them with a lump of coral, added them to the feast, then crawled under the bush to cuddle beside me.

What a feast it was! In a European dining room it would have been a sorry mess; but here, with the silken trade wind, the thundery barrier reef, the moonlight dodging between the magnolia leaves—here, with my atoll girl at my side, equally willing to nibble the broiled albacore or my shoulder ... sons of Adam! And yet I have journeyed away from PukaPuka solely to taste again the insipid, the indigestible, the artificial cuisine of civilization served by chaste and hard-faced waitresses!

Yesterday afternoon I lay on the counter in Araipu's store and daydreamed of the fleshpots of civilization, while betimes Araipu squatted on the floor, splitting matches lengthwise so as to double the number in each box. The tightwad! He does not have to do this, for he has bags and bags of money; but the rest of the neighbors have a good excuse for splitting their matches: that is, they have only enough money to afford two or three boxes a year. Araipu laid each match circumspectly on a block of wood; then he fixed his razorsharp pipe knife along the edge of it and pressed down. Sometimes, when the matchwood ran diagonally, the split pieces would break off close to the head, but they were kept nevertheless, and each one would light a lamp or kindle a fire though it burned the stingy storekeeper's fingers in the bargain.

Splitting matches is not the end of our thrift. Seldom does a man light his pipe with even the shortest sliver of a broken match. When a light is needed he sends a child to beg fire from house to house or even village to village, and his pipe waits until the child has returned with a burning spathe or a smoldering husk. If the child can find no fire, the man grudgingly takes a split match and, sheltered from the wind, lights a coconut husk with which he kindles a fire, finally to light his pipe with a live coal.

However, I have left myself lying on Araipu's counter, my head pillowed on a bolt of unbleached calico. I believe it was at the time my thoughts had turned to Aunt Adelina and the salt-rising bread she used to make, and how tasty it was with homemade butter and strawberry jam, that William the Heathen came tramping and blustering into the store.

William the Heathen, the reprobate, the ex-whaler, the beer guzzler, the blasphemer! He is ageless. When I first met him I judged he was close to eighty; but today he appears neither a day older nor a day younger—unless it is when he is drinking bush beer, for at such times he seems to shuffle off a score of years, his eyes brighten, his tongue wags more profanely than usual; and often enough, leaping to his feet, he will move with the limberness of youth through one of the obscene dances of pagan times.

William is the lone heathen of Danger Island, frequently in trouble with both secular and religious authorities, who know little of the man's cultural background. They consider William no more than a worthless Kanaka with a thirst for the poisonous coconut-husk beer that he brews secretly in his little hut by the taro bed of Kawa. He has a keen sense of the degradation that has

fallen on his people since the coming of the white man. He corresponds, in Polynesia, to some old Indian chief, the descendant of warriors, in the Americas, who cannot and will not adapt himself to the modern conditions of life; to whom existence is alone made endurable by means of the liquor that enables him from time to time to forget.

I have called him a heathen. True, from his youth to his eightieth-odd year he had been the sole heathen on this otherwise Christian island; but a few months ago the galvanizing report was cried through the villages that he had joined the Seventh-Day Adventist Chapel! At first it was thought that the heathen intended to break up the chapel, to do some scandalous thing during meetings—smoke his greasy old pipe while the pastor was praying or rise to tell improper anecdotes from his life as a whaler. But William did none of these things. His deep-dyed strategy was discovered later. When it was learned that he had been put in charge of the chapel's moneybag, and when he started going to Araipu's store with pennies, threepenny bits, and sixpences (with which to buy Adventist-proscribed tobacco), it became quite evident why he had become a Christian. At the present moment it is rumored that William is about to leave the chapel; collections are too small to warrant his splendid hypocrisy.

"Gimme sixpence niggerhead!" the heathen growled today, moving to the counter to strike it with his fist. Having been a whaler in his youth, William affects a sort of sailor English. To him tobacco is either niggerhead or bonded jackey.

Araipu sighed and picked up a split match to eye it critically, while the heathen stood glowering and muttering curses at both of us.

"You got some money, oh yes?" I asked, mimicking his way of speech.

"Money? Sure t'ing! All the same bloody cowboy millionaires, too much money all the time!" Bang! and his hand came down to slap a sixpence on the counter.

"There must have been a big collection last Sabbath in the Adventist Chapel," I muttered.

William ignored the thrust with the fine contempt of a hardened thief, so I went on: "Let's take a walk behind the church. I want to find a place to build a henhouse. I plan to get married soon, so I want to get my establishment in order: have some chickens, and pigs, and ducks, and things for—for the girl I marry."

"I'll come too," Araipu said, fitting the last of the split matches into their box. "I want to look at my duck." Then he sold William a stick and a half of twist, untied his moneybag, circumspectly put the sixpence in, tied the bag again, put it in his chest, locked the chest, and grinned in a manner that informed us the day's business was done.

William took charge of the expedition. He led us to the big grove of *hernandia* trees behind the church, and there he stopped to peer searchingly along the paths leading inland, across the cemetery to westward, and toward

the village houses. But presently he nodded his head as though with complete satisfaction and muttered that it would be a number-one place to build a henhouse, all right, all right.

"It's rather too damp and shady, isn't it?" I objected.

"*Too* shady?" William queried, accenting the first word. "Plenty shade, that's good. When you get married your wife no see you when you feed the hens. Plenty trees, plenty dark. You come 'long this path, walk 'round behind church. Miss Legs come 'long that path, walk 'round behind school. Then you both go in bush by taro bed of Kawa. Oh yes," he muttered, nodding his head thoughtfully, "I t'ink this number-one place for build henhouse."

"I don't see that a man has to sneak out here if he wants to meet Miss Legs."

For a moment the heathen eyed me ironically, then suddenly he threw back his hoary old head to roar with laughter, while Araipu, only half understanding, stared at us bewildered. "Oh, bloody hell!" William guffawed. "You too much savvy, all right, all right! You been poking up floor boards in Miss Legs' house and crawling in at night, I t'ink, oh yes, Goddam! Go ta hell! I tell everybody 'bout it soon as I get home!"

"What a depraved old heathen you are," I growled, "talking that way to a man who is about to be married! Come on, Araipu; I'm going to build my henhouse in the middle of the village road. Let's have a look at your duck."

We moved toward the duck pen, but we had gone only a few steps when we came to Constable Benny's pig, so we stopped, of course, to observe it and pass a few sarcastic remarks.

Benny was formerly my store boy, but when the station was closed he changed his profession from commerce to law, put on weight, became opinionated and much too overbearing with the neighbors. Formerly he was an ideal store boy, and, more important, an expert brewer, but that was before he had become a deacon, a councilman, and a constable. Think of all these titles crowning the head of a single Danger Islander! How can one blame him for having grandiose delusions concerning himself?

Only a few nights ago he arrested five boys and five girls for loitering on the beach after curfew. There was a great to-do about it. Horatio Augustus lectured them on the sin of cohabitation and fined each one five pounds. The amount of the fine was of no consequence, for fines are never paid, and anyway, five pounds means about as much to a Danger Islander as an astronomical light-year means to me—it is beyond their grasp.

The songsters had a withering revenge. One dark and rainy night they sneaked into the grove of hernandia trees where Benny keeps his pig and they cut off its tail! Not a soul saw them; but Benny, on a hunch, hauled them to court again, whereupon they were each fined another five pounds. Benny, however, is now the laughing-stock of the entire island. The Central villagers have composed a song about the curtailment, which they will sing at the New Year's festival:

Alas!

Where is the tail of the constable's pig

Alas! Alas! Alas!

the song goes. It makes Benny mad as a hornet to hear the villagers rehearsing it.

We observed and discussed his pig from all angles and aspects. After satisfying ourselves that the stump of its tail would not grow again and its general appearance was one of humiliation and anxiety, we proceeded to Araipu's duck.

She was in a pen, taking life easy during her period of ovulation. We observed her for a long time, not saying anything in particular or thinking anything in particular: just observing so we would not have to do anything more strenuous; then:

"I see she is laying," I remarked.

"Yes," Araipu confirmed; "six eggs."

"There's no drake. The eggs won't be fertile."

"A drake mounted her last month, before I put her in the pen."

"Will one time be enough? Don't they have to go through the ordeal for each egg?"

Araipu scowled, then glanced at me in an annoyed way—but I could not decide if he were disheartened at the thought of having to catch a drake and put him in the pen or was merely perplexed over the biological problem. "*Ke* [I don't know]!" was all he replied.

But William knew all about it. "Sure t'ing!" he bellowed. "Half a dozen times for each egg—all same womans! You t'ink maybe—so womans catch baby after one time? Hell no! You mount her two, t'ree hun'erd time and she catch baby! You ask Ropati: he too much savvy. He gonna get married pretty soon, and he all the time poke up floor boards in Miss Legs' house, and Miss Legs no catch no baby yet! Hell and damn! I laugh too much now!" And thereupon the heathen laughed—or rather guffawed.

After this burst of erudition we dropped the subject, none of us being very good on biology. We decided, in Danger Island fashion, to wait and observe, and learn.

Desire has been arrested by strong and fearless Constable Benny, charged with loitering at night after curfew—not with "cohabitation," as they quaintly call the crime in these islands, prudishly omitting any adjective such as "lascivious" that might explain what they mean. But in court it was more than broadly hinted that of course a girl would not be walking alone at night

toward the trading station for any honest purpose.

I listened to the trial from an adjoining room, mad as a hornet as I glared at Mrs. Susanna Augustus, who stood near me, spying through the wattle partition, visibly excited. I heard His Worship Horatio Augustus preach on the sin of fornication, sputter texts, wax eloquent, and probably become tumescent as he wallowed in a sadistic spree. And presently I heard him shout: "Are you guilty?" and then Desire, by now convinced that she was being charged with cohabitation, gasp in a thin, terrified voice, "No!"

"All right!" Horatio shouted. "Don't do it again! [*sic!*] You are sentenced to ten days in jail!"

I knew the sentence was a slap on my own face. Horatio does not dare bring me to court, so he humiliates me indirectly by punishing my friends. On this day it would have done me good to have walked into the courtroom and slapped the sanctimonious hypocrite's face; but I recalled in time that I was a foreigner, and, as an official once pointed out, was privileged to leave the island at any time that the administration became obnoxious. Moreover, it would have only made things worse for Desire.

In practice Desire's sentence means that she must work every day from 8 A.M. to noon for Mrs. Susanna Augustus—who, incidentally, humiliates her with the peculiar viciousness of the sexually repressed prude. The sentence is no less than terrible for poor little Desire. She is no longer her bright, laughing, innocent self; she finds it necessary to defend herself behind a sullen and unnaturally aggressive exterior.

One afternoon, during her period of correction, I saw her sprawled face downward on the leaning bole of a coconut tree, in an immodest posture, her legs gripping the bole. She was dressed in the vilest of old rags; her hair had not been combed for days; her face was dirty. Without a doubt she was having her fill of self-humiliation. She stared at me sullenly when I approached.

"Hello, Miss Memory," I said, putting my arm around her. "Don't glare at me as though I were the resident agent. You know I love you." Then I said some other things, which there is no need to repeat. When I left she was smiling, we had made a date, and she had given me a kiss.

Desire's trouble has led me to think lately of the sex tapu and its influence over both civilized and primitive man. We make profound changes in the economic life of the South Sea Islanders, but their sex tapu remains unaltered. Christianity adds only sex hypocrisy. I say this advisedly: Christianity has made no substantial change in the sex tapu of the Polynesians, but it has taught the island people to conceive as sinful that which they formerly looked on as a natural and felicitous function of life. The rank and file of the missionaries—not the leaders—have been unable to understand that the sex hypocrisy which they insinuate into native life is a far greater evil than the promiscuity which they so one-mindedly, and futilely, try to suppress.

We must not get the erroneous notion that people like the Danger Islanders live in a state of sexual saturnalia. Their sexual lives are no more

active than those of the Londoners or the New Yorkers; it is rather that they approach the subject with more realism and that there are fewer inhibitions. When the youth go to the places of love they do not grab girls indiscriminately and drag them into the bushes to violate them. Many a night there may be no sexual relations; on other nights two or three pairs of lovers may slip away from the groups. The youth are at the places of love primarily to sing and dance and tell stories, to be away from their elders, to feel momentarily the intoxication of a youth-governed society. College boys have their fraternities for the same purpose. Moreover, primitive boys are like civilized boys in that they fall in love. Often enough a lad will cleave to his first girl and marry her; it is exceptional for a lad to go through all available women before he chooses his mate. The girls are far more promiscuous than the boys; they seem less inclined to fix their affections on a single man. Perhaps they know intuitively, from some atavistic source, that this is their only period of complete freedom; after marriage they must settle down to household duties and nursing babies. Therefore they live (as Horatio Augustus puts it) as active "social lives" as their men will grant them.

If my life in the South Seas has taught me anything, it is this: Do not meddle with the sex tapu of primitive people; your own sex tapu may have less virtue than theirs.

Let me return to Desire. In another country her sentence might have wrecked her life, but on Danger Island she can restore her self-respect in the arms of a lover—mine, in this case. The effect of the Augustuses' sex hypocrisy is not so harmful as might be expected, for the people do not take a court sentence seriously. There are cases, like Desire's, where a sentence wounds deeply and may turn the course of life for the worse; but most of the neighbors have too lively a sense of humor and too nice a sense of values to be humiliated or even distressed by our remarkable form of jurisprudence. Of course no good can come from such stupid meddling; whatever effect it has is bad. It is like mumps, a baneful disease which can be borne, which often causes amusement, but which may occasionally leave scars for life.

The young people have always led free sexual lives; now they are often obliged to do so surreptitiously—and this, of course, adds excitement to the adventure. The Augustuses increase promiscuity by making it a fruit particularly delicious because it is forbidden. Man has always made this error in psychology, perhaps because his prototype, Jehovah, made it in the year 4004 B.C., as is written.

Desire will be able to restore her integrity in the arms of her lover; and if she takes the advice I gave her she will do it tonight, for I have told her I would wait for her on our coral-head trysting place. But if Desire had no established lover the procedure would be different, for the girls on this island lure the men to chase them, even as birds and beasts and society women do. They walk the road at night, and when the boys chase them they run shrieking into the bush. On being caught they make a pretense of struggle, but in a

moment they admit defeat, put their arms around their captor, give him a kiss, and go with him to the Place of Love, or, which is more likely, return to the road to play the game again.

This game is called *tango-tango*; it only occasionally results in a sexual act. The sexually repressed puritan, observing a big game of tango-tango, would declare that every girl on Danger Island is violated scores of times every night; but many a virgin plays tango-tango with her father's consent and is not violated until she wants it to happen. Probably all deeply enamored couples, who have no inclination toward promiscuity, play tango-tango for the fun of the thing, the same as we play tag or hide-and-seek. Any girl who wishes to preserve her chastity—and there are many—is safe on the loneliest trail at any hour of night. If one asks a wild youth: "How about *that* girl?" one will be told: "Oh, she is tapu," or, "She is our meat."

But when the young people join the church they play tango-tango no more; it is forbidden. Now they change their tactics to *Ulu'u*, which invariably ends in a sexual act. In *Ulu'u*, you worm on your belly into the house of a deacon and tickle the toes of his daughter (praying betimes like a good Christian that you are not tickling the toes of the deacon) until she awakens, when you crawl with her into the cookhouse and talk shop.

On this Aegean isle the Calypsos are much more wanton than the Odysseans—incomparably more wanton. On a Sunday night, after a day spent in puritan hypocrisy, with only slight titillation from listening to the "sex religion" of Parson Sea Foam, the girls and the unmarried women comb the island for men.

How often, on a Sunday night, do we see a company of girls marching past the station, each one wearing a wide-brimmed pandanus hat! They march four abreast, in three lines, and they turn their heads neither to right nor left though they know we are watching them from the shadows of the balcony. Then, "Where are you going?" we shout. "Why the hats?"

"You mustn't speak to us," one of them replies snobbishly, and we recognize the voice of Strange-Eyes. "We are white women strolling through the native village. We are observing the primitive island." And then, from Miss Legs, with a half-suppressed whoop: "We are hunting lovers for the night!"

Suddenly the group shrieks like a banshee; the group explodes like a shrapnel!

Here come the cowboys of Danger Island!

A white dress describes a parabola over the churchyard wall; a yellow dress hurtles down the road; a green dress shoots behind First-Born's house; a red dress rockets up in the air to disappear in the neighborhood of Betelgeuse!

Here come the barbarians!

Shouts, screams, billy-goat noises, silence!

In three seconds the village road is deserted. There is not a soul in sight. We fancy this fantastic rape of the Sabines was something we had read about

long ago in a naughty fairy tale. Then we hear Mr. Horse strumming his cocolelé, the giggling of a dancing girl; we hear a man whooping someplace out in the lagoon—whooping simply because he feels like whooping, not necessarily because he has caught a fish or a meteor has struck his head.

Laughter, the tramp of feet! Here comes the parade again, hats and all! They have not been raped after all: they are only playing tango-tango! When they are tired of the game they will go after men in earnest... .

For in the quiet hours of night, while lying on our sleeping mat, only vaguely conscious of the snores of the Watch and Ward out woman-chasing in their dreams—while longing once again to drink tea and read Browning with Penelope—while pondering chastity, purity in thought and deed, suppression of the bestial cravings of the lower man—how often do we hear the crunch of coral gravel under bare feet, a soft incontinent laugh, husky girl voices whispering! The stairs creak; the folds of the mosquito net ripple; the odor of scented coconut oil insinuates itself into our thoughts as welcomingly as the fingers, the lips, the breasts of an atoll Calypso hungry for love.

Chapter IV

NOW the schooner is in, and once again I am a South Sea trader; the days of epicurean beachcombing are at an end—and a good thing, too, with marriage imminent. For the past few days I have been busy brightening up the trade room with smell soap, Lord Beaconsfield Twist Tobacco, Derby Honey Dew Cut Plug, lollipops, print, muslin, dungaree, unbleached calico, some hanks of fishline, bright red firecrackers and shiny mouth organs, bush knives and pipe knives, striped singlets and squeaking shoes—the same shoddy junk that I sold back in the 1920's.

There is displayed on the shelves at the present moment an assortment of fine matting, stick-to-the-chests, and stick-to-the-legs. You no savvy? How dense! Fine matting is cloth, and the stick-things are undershirts and pants. Also there is a whole gross of cero-kingfish, sometimes known as pipe knives because of the tobacco pipes the makers stamp on each blade as a trade mark, but which we call cero-kingfish because the tooth of that fish was our knife in the old days. Also there is a case of doctor soap, which is known as carbolic soap in other countries. Our name demonstrates that modern advertising has reached even the loneliest isles of the South Seas.

It is easy enough to imagine that all the remnants from the old station had been stored for the past eight years, now to be once again offered for sale. In my books the trade goods are worth £1,115/6/4! I caught my breath when I noted this sum jotted boldly against the store, and then turned my eyes to glance at the moldy, faded, and perished goods on my shelves! The smell has long since vanished from the smell soap, which is discouraging, for it is the only quality my customers will look for—or, rather, smell for. But conversely there is scarcely anything left but the squeak in the squeaking shoes, which is encouraging, for my customers will want nothing else. Also, I find the company has sent me a gross of ladies' bloomers and a gross of jew's-harps. Now how does the damned company expect me to sell ladies' bloomers and jew's-harps? However, there they are: two-and-sixpence each, and take your choice.

Thank God *that's* done! For six solid days I have been sweating over the counter, but now the bulk of the 250 pounds that the company paid for our copra is in my camphorwood chest. The few shillings that are left with the villagers will dribble into Araipu's store during the next six months, principally in tobacco, match, and fishhook sales. That's the way it is here; just like old times. When the people get a few shillings they have a spending

spree. They can no more keep their money than can a child; and, most remarkable of all, it makes little difference whether the trade goods are new or old, of some conceivable use or worthless: the fun of spending is the principal thing. Thus my ladies' bloomers and my jew's-harps were snapped up in half an hour, as I shall explain later.

I entered the trading post by the back doorway. By being quick and ruthless I managed to slam the door behind me before any of the jostling crowd had forced their way in. Only a few fingers and toes got jammed. Then I opened the front door and vaulted behind the counter, when instantly the place was packed with a solid mob of yelling savages! I do not exaggerate. All that day and the next day and the next day the place was a solid mass of sweating, yelling, writhing human flesh. Over their closely fitted heads, through the upper part of the doorway, as far as the schoolhouse I could see an undulating field of unkempt hair; in the window on my left was a mass of faces, solidly fitted cheek to cheek and chin to crown, with scores of arms stuck through the interstices between the chins and necks, with scores of hands gripping shillings and florins, scores of voices yelling: "Ropati! Ropati! Hi, Ropati! Tobacco! Hair oil! Doctor soap!"

I have said that the company sent me a gross of ladies' bloomers and a gross of jew's-harps. Well, Saturday afternoon I found Miss Tern loitering about the station, so I called her in, showed her a pair of bloomers, and asked her to be a customer on Monday morning. This she agreed to do when I had given her the two-and-sixpence needed to buy the bloomers. Incidentally, Miss Tern is good looking and is a singularly successful man-hunter. For this reason the women are jealous of her, and for the same reason I picked her as the ideal customer to start the bloomer sale.

Monday morning I saw her working her way into the mob. It required strength of mind and body. She had virtually to climb over deacons and crawl between the legs of councilmen—but she got to the counter at about noon. For a moment she let her great Semitic eyes move from the painkiller to the Dolly dyes; then, fixing them on the pair of bloomers hanging immodestly from a tie beam, she raised her lovely arms, pointed upward, and, as per instruction, started yelling with a sort of frenzied jubilation: "Bloomers! Bloomers!" And when I pretended not to hear her she went on: "Quick, Ropati, gimme the bloomers before some silly Leeward Village girl buys them!"

"That's all right, Miss Tern," I said casually. "I have three or four pairs under the counter."

"They'll be sold out!" Miss Tern screamed, reaching up as though she would pull the pair from the tie beam. "Oh, please, quick, Ropati, the bloomers!"

When I had handed them to her and unblushingly taken the two shillings and sixpence she shrieked with delight, waved them over her head, and, despite the press, did a wild hula-hula, bumping her hips against Mrs. First-Born on her left and Mrs. Scratch on her right. If there had been a helluva

hullabaloo a moment before there was a helluva helluva hullabaloo now. Men, women, and children started buying bloomers as fast as I could hand them out. Bloomers were passed out the window; bloomers were passed out the back doorway; bloomers were passed over the heads of the customers to people in the road. Old grandpapas bought them; children bought them; even Desire bought a pair. Within three minutes the whole stock had been sold out; then they started on the jew's-harps, the sales stimulation having been arranged for, through the person of my friend Mr. Horse, in the same manner as the bloomer sale.

Thus the crack trader handles such little matters as selling unsalable goods. Had there been a gross of medieval helmets they would have been snapped up just as quickly. The thought: "It's a bargain," or, "If I don't buy now they'll be sold out," blocks the ability to estimate the article's utility.

Thank God it is over with! It was in some ways a pleasant break in atoll life, but I've had enough of it for six months. From now on Araipu will handle the tobacco and match sales and weigh my copra, while I pursue the affair of my heart. I am not cheating the company in doing this. I am doing all that is expected of me. So long as I have weighed in the copra and taken in all the money there is on the island my employer will be satisfied. If there is any village business, such as costumes for the Christmas celebrations, then I will open the station for a few hours; but otherwise I will open it only to sell wholesale to Araipu or get out a few things for Horatio and myself. Hory, I fancy, will be a big customer in hair oil, perfume, back combs, talcum powder, and such incidentals to one's "social life." Yes, despite his sadistic sprees in the courtroom, His Worship is one of our most successful woman-chasers.

Greasy, crafty, dishonest, conceited Eliu, the supercargo of Windward Village, came through the back doorway on tiptoe, his eyes furtively darting this way and that, under the counter and behind packing cases, as though he were hunting for spies or eggs or murderers or pins. It was a long time before he could trust himself to speak, and then his communication came in fragmentary hints:

"There is talk, Ropati—wind-talk," he whispered, somehow giving me the impression, as usual, that his mouth was full of mutton fat. "Wind-talk, Ropati. Wind-talk from Ko; wind-talk from Frigate Bird ... It is said that things are not as they should be in the trading station—the wind-talk says so, Ropati—the wind-talk from Ko and Frigate Bird ... Prices, Ropati, prices ... The wind-talk says that you raise the prices!"

"Well, what about it?"

"Prices, Ropati! ... The wind-talk says that you buy your goods cheap—and *raise the prices!* ... Of course I know you wouldn't do such a dishonest thing; but then there is wind-talk, Ropati, wind-talk ... You wouldn't buy

tobacco for eight shillings a pound and sell it for sixteen! You wouldn't do such a dishonest thing, would you, Ropati?"

"Sure I would—and I reckon I know where the windtalk comes from: Horatio Augustus, eh?"

Eliu became more furtive than ever. His words were scarcely audible when he whispered: "You know, Ropati, that I am going to open a store ... Can I do it? ... Can I raise the prices like you do—like the wind-talk says you do?"

"Of course you can; it's easy. You buy a hundred pounds worth of goods and sell them for two hundred pounds. That's all there is to it."

Eliu pressed his lips together and squinted his eyes. His breath came quick and his words more pinguid than ever. "I'll do it!" he exclaimed in a whisper. "How wise the white men are! ... Buy, one hundred pounds ... Sell, two hundred pounds! ... Whee-ee! ... So that's how the white men make their millions! ... I'll open a store tomorrow! ... Today! ... You give me one hundred pounds of goods on credit, and I'll sell them for two hundred pounds. Then I'll pay you a hundred pounds and keep the other hundred pounds!"

"I won't give you any credit."

Eliu scowled blackly; the mutton fat turned acrid in his mouth. He tiptoed to the doorway to scan the yard and beach; then, returning to the counter, "You'd better give me the goods!" he hissed. "You'd better, Ropati ... because ... if you don't ... I'll tell everybody you're a crooked trader ... You *raise the prices!*"

Horatio Augustus' personal goods from the schooner, amounting to nearly a ton, were landed with my goods and stored in the station. We had no time or inclination to sort them out while the schooner was here or during the business rush; but this afternoon Hory came to the station, to interrupt Desire and me in a game of marbles, and demanded his goods. We rolled up our sleeves and went to work; and when Hory's gear was stacked in front of the counter he told me, in an offhand manner, to have it delivered at once to the government residency; so I stepped on the front porch and called:

"A stick of Lord Beaconsfield Twist Tobacco for each strong young man that helps carry His Worship's gear to the government shack!"

There was a stampede. Old gentlemen and young, they came leaping to the station, yelling: "Ropati! Me! Tobacco! Me!"

Deacon Bribery shouldered a forty-pound tin of biscuits, and the sea-monkey Poaza a fifty-pound bag of flour, and Mr. Horse a case of tomatoes, and First-Born a bag of rice. Twentyfive porters shouldered Horatio's gear, as I knew, for I had bought a pound of twist—twenty-six sticks—and I had one stick left when the twenty-fifth man staggered into the road—and there was one seventy-pound bag of sugar left to go. I glanced up and down the road. Not a soul was in sight except the porters and hefty old Mrs. Scratch, squint-

eyed and grinning as usual. She wobbled from the road to the porch, through the doorway, snatching en route the last stick of tobacco from my hand; then she shouldered the seventy-pound bag of sugar as effortlessly as would a stevedore and, wobbling more alarmingly than before, followed a few steps in the wake of the cheerful porters.

Horatio followed in the wake of Mrs. Scratch. His cork helmet being at precisely the correct angle, and his twenty-six porters being visible at once as they filed through Central Village, Hory's ego was, I fancy, exalted above the highest coconut trees. He smirked a little, believing himself smiling charmingly, when he saw the lovely Kura standing by Constable Benny's house, grinning equivocally as she watched her important lover hoofing it along like a colonial Englishman among the coolies.

Desire and I, standing in the doorway, also grinned.

Sight gives you only a coldly detached vision of the familiar spirit of place. When you hear him snore and feel his hairy chest you are casually acquainted, but when you smell and taste the little devil you know him to the marrow of his bones. That is one reason why I must tell you something about what we eat and drink; another reason is that, the Christmas holidays being but a few days past, the time is fitting for a dissertation on food.

On every island one finds a different way of making the native oven. This is our method: we dig a shallow pit, nine inches deep and four feet square, and wall it with upright blocks of coral or pandanus logs. If we are lucky we have fifty pounds or so of volcanic stones for our oven; if not, there is a hard coral that serves the purpose but soon crumbles under the heat. A fire is kindled in the pit and the stones are laid on it. When the fire has died down the hot stones are leveled by prodding them with the butt end of a frond, and the food, wrapped in leaves or in coconut-shell containers, is laid on the stones. Then the food is covered with sections of green coconut husk and pieces of old matting. Enough steam is formed in the green husks to keep the food moist. That's all there is to it, unless I add that it is a good idea to weigh down the outer edges of the matting so the neighbors' pigs and cats do not nab your dinner.

The coconut-shell container that I have mentioned is a large drinking nut from which the meat has been scraped out and a section from which about two inches in diameter has been cut off the eye end. Chopped taro with coconut cream is cooked in this container; also clams, fish fillets, and turtle, the last being one of the choicest foods on earth—a little fat, a little lean, a few fetal eggs, some chopped onion, and salt to taste. Bake at least two hours, with the top of the container covered with green leaves, and you have a meal for a king, his queen, and all the little royalties in the bargain.

Our fish we bake wrapped in green leaves, grill on coconut-shell coals, or boil with coconut cream. We seldom eat raw fish, but we eat raw lobster

whenever we can get the wherewithal. When a man begs or steals a few limes from Frigate Bird Islet he hides them in the cookhouse thatch, then goes surreptitiously to the reef and dives through the breakers to swim down to his private lobster hole. Now, the position of a lobster hole, where whole colonies live and breed, is a closely guarded secret passed down from father to son; so the fisherman scans the reef and lagoon before he dives, and if anyone is in sight he abandons the expedition for the time being. But if the coast is clear he dives to his hole, reaches in, and pulls out a pair of lobsters. It sounds easy, but try it. I shall carry for life the scars of coral cuts that I have gotten trying to pull lobsters from their holes. I have filled my hands with sea-urchin spines; I have been bitten by eels, pinched by crabs, clutched by octopods, but never have I pulled a lobster from his hole.

Home again, the fisherman flings the forward end of each creature to the women and brats; then he removes the shell from the tail end, chops the white meat into small cubes, and squeezes lime juice on it. In a few hours he drains off most of the lime juice, then adds a cupful of sour coconut sauce and, if he has it, some chopped onion. Finally he chases everybody away, lets out his belt, smacks his lips, and feeds like the king of a South Sea isle, washing down the luscious meat with *mangaro* beer.

I slip the beer recipe to you *entre nous* because Honorable Horatio frowns on brewing, while Lady Susanna classifies as drunkards all men who so much as sip wine with their meals. Anyway, with a weather eye peeled for the police, bake ten green mangaro nuts (the variety with sweet edible husks), split them lengthways, pour their water in your beer tub, beat the husks with a heavy stick and squeeze the water from them into your tub; then, when the liquid is cool, add enough coconut water to make five gallons. If you wish to speed up the brewing, add the water from a quarter pound of boiled hops, and if you wish a strong brew, add three or four pounds of brown sugar. In four days it is ready. Very intoxicating and perhaps slightly narcotic. Only optimists try to cross the causeway singing "A Wee Doch-an-Dorris" after the third glass.

When I tell you that we atoll people live principally on coconuts and fish you probably fancy us with a mature coconut in one hand and a live fish in the other, biting into them alternately. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mature coconuts, such as one buys in a civilized country, are eaten only occasionally. They are used for making coconut cream, as follows: Split a ripe coconut in two by tapping it gently with a bush-knife midway between the eye end and the base, grate the meat, place the resultant flakes in a mat of hibiscus bark, coconut fiber, or a piece of strong cloth, and squeeze. Result: your cream. It sours in a few hours when, with the addition of two thirds of its quantity of sea water and a few chili peppers, some garlic, or onion, it becomes sour coconut sauce. When dining, one pours a bowlful of the sauce, then crushes the food in it and eats with one's fingers, head bent close to the bowl, fingers raised quickly to the mouth so the sauce will not drip back, and

taken with a hearty, noisy intake of breath so as to intensify the flavor by oxidization My chemistry may be faulty—I'll not swear by it—but I know that coconut sauce taken noiselessly, urbanely, with a spoon is insipid stuff.

That is virtually our only use for the mature coconut; the green one is the one eaten. It is cracked in two; about half the water is poured in a bowl, and the meat is scraped out and added to the water. The scraper is made of pearl shell or iron, two inches by ten, with one end spoon-shaped and the other end serrated. To the meat and water baked *uto* is often added; *uto* is the pulpy, absorbing organ that forms in a sprouting coconut. It looks like a puffball but is more oily and palpable. To obtain the best utos the sprouting coconuts are husked and the sprouts and roots are cut off at about an inch from the eyes. The coconuts are then laid in the sun for a few hours so the ends of severed sprouts will sere; then they are buried. In two or three months the utos absorb most of the coconut meat and, the sprouts having been cut off they retain the absorbed matter, become rich, crisp, and very good eating, raw or baked. During the Christmas holidays, with no flour or biscuits on the island, my household nibbled raw *uto* with their coffee.

Our diet, consisting of coconuts and fish with an occasional dish of taro, may sound monotonous, but it is not so in practice—any more than the Englishman's diet of roast beef and potatoes is monotonous. Now and then there is a scrawny atoll chicken, sea birds, a bunch of bananas once in a blue moon, and perhaps a mummy apple on the Fourth of July and St. Patrick's Day. None of these is a regular article of diet. The Danger Islanders do not drink tea or coffee, eat bread, ship's biscuits, or any other European food except bully-beef and rice, which last they may indulge in once or twice a year. Yet their diet contains all the ingredients necessary to build a strong people and keep them healthy. I have eaten it for so many years that I can assimilate little else. The vegetables and fruits that, I am told, are "absolutely indispensable" make me ill; and when on Danger Island I feel a trifle off color I eat a bowl of raw *tridacna* clams soaked in sour coconut sauce, or I chew the sweet husk of a green mangaro nut, and in a few hours I am in the pink of health. Even taro disagrees with me, and I tire of fish . . . but a coconut! Ah, a coconut contains everything necessary to support a man from the cradle to the grave.

From where I sit in my thatched house on Matauea Point, on the islet of Ko, I have a fine view of the horseshoe bay and the four miles of reef stretching to the main islet. Across the bay, to eastward, is Matautu Point, where Pio and I beached our canoe the night we went woman-hunting; and at the head of the bay is the copra makers' village, where we found Desire and her mother eating coconut crabs by the light of a tiny fire; and behind me, two miles to westward, but visible if I lean over and look under the low eaves, is

Frigate Bird Islet.

Desire is in the cookhouse with her mother, for Honorable Horatio Augustus has condescended to allow her to live with me as a servant; and Desire's sisters, Tangi, Vaevae, Pati, and Tili, are diving from the little wharf I have built into the lagoon. Three native boys are with them, but they seem unaware that they are swimming and playing with four naked maidens. When I was their age such a sight would have shocked me beyond measure. Even now I cannot look at them, without an impulse to snort and paw the earth; the native boys look at them with clean unconsciousness of sex. Howbeit, if I am to tell of the Christmas holidays I must turn my eyes from the lovely and (to me) exciting scene on the wharf.

At Danger Island Christmas is the time for exchange of gifts, not the time for altruism. If we accept this fact gracefully as a custom in the land of our adoption we lose none of our respect for the people and we go through the Christmas ordeal with little pain.

Several days before Christmas the people started coming with their presents. Old Mr. Scratch brought me a conch shell because he wanted a stick of tobacco-bless him! he told me so—may his lumbago be easier this coming year. Moonfaced Deacon Tane and his moonfaced wife came with their arms full of mats and hats, shell wreaths, and a nicely carved cordia-wood box to keep knickknacks in. They sat in the house for an hour or more, scarcely saying a word but eying with disfavor the other neighbors who brought gifts: Mr. Horse with a roll of sennit, Mama Tala with a pandanus mat, Tangi with a plaited basket, Araipu with a ruvettus hook, Desire with a beautiful white hat she had made herself. The presents piled up, seventy-two of them; and on Christmas Eve I made the rounds of the three villages, figged out in white drill, with suitable speeches on the end of my tongue, and with my pockets and arms full of cartons of matches, sticks of twist tobacco, bars of soap, packages of firecrackers, and a few lengths of dress goods for particular friends.

I turned in at midnight, but rose bright and early to join the grand parade.

This was the woman's year, when the men were supposed to stay at home and cook the food; but I joined the parade nevertheless, being an important person who is not obliged to abide by all the customs.

With sharkskin drums a-booming and wooden gongs a-rat-a-tatting, the women of Central Village crossed the causeway to Leeward Village, and there they danced for an hour or more, while now and again the youths of Leeward Village leaped forward to knock their knees together, swing their arms, and in other ways give vent to their libidos. The older men laid out a mighty feast which was done justice to in a mighty way, slim maidens gormandizing as much pork as could a stevedore. But all the pork and fish and taro were joggled down when the women recrossed the causeway, passed silently through their own village, and entered noisily Windward Village; for there they danced for another hour or two, and ate more great hunks of pork, which

same would be joggled down during the final dance in Central Village. Meanwhile the Windward and Leeward village women were having an equally grand time in the other villages. At dusk they joined forces before Constable Benny's house; drums boomed and gongs rattled, hips swayed, knees, knocked together, eyes flashed, everybody yelled for all he was worth, the last of the fat pork was joggled down, and, in a word, a marvelous time was had by all.

The rest of the week, save for Sunday, was devoted to the noble game of cricket, fifty players to a side, and if the ball gets lodged in a coconut tree it counts six runs. I know little of cricket, and, like any Yankee, care less, but I will say that these people take it in deadly earnest. It is almost warfare with them. I should not wonder but that they shuffle off a lot of aggressiveness during the long-drawn-out games, and get rid of the last vestiges of it when they "insult the losers." I cannot say exactly how the losers get rid of *their* aggressiveness. Maybe they go home and slap their wives, or they bury the hatchet until May Day, when another intervillage game will give them their chance.

As far as I am concerned, this mania for doing things, for excitement, for action is not an essential ingredient in the abundant life. A good digestion, a healthy liver, and a gentle wife make the most uneventful day abundant. But how strange it is that we humans suffer from a surfeit of happiness more than from a surfeit of pain! After a long period of health and happiness I am often driven to break the strain through a carousal. I have just recovered from one. I am not repentant, for repentance plays a small part in my life; but I am perplexed: I want to know why I drank a case of whiskey in ten days—alone and singlehanded, as the tautologists say.

I am normal again now and feel much better for the spree. Without a doubt it has been a psychological cathartic. Probably I shall not need another cleaning out till the trading schooner returns and—so I hear—the Augustus family leaves.

You will want to know where I got the case of liquor. Patience: it is a long story, including the most spectacular event to occur since the landing of the first missionaries.

First I must tell you that Desire and I are living in Mama Tala's house at the head of the horseshoe bay, for the Augustuses are at my old place on Matauea Point. Desire's lovely sisters live with us, while other relatives, Parson Sea Foam among them, come and go in the seemingly aimless native way.

Mama Tala is a large, placid woman, pleasant company, and tolerant of the easy morals of her daughters. Maloku, a half sister to Desire, is getting on in years, has a good husband living with her next door and numerous children. Tangi is an exquisitely lovely girl, starting her love life and therefore more

demure than the other sisters. Though of frail health, she looks a good deal like Desire but lacks the latter's delicate features. Vaevae-of-the-budding-breasts is too epicene to be judged by the standards of a South Sea trader, as is Tili a little girl of six with the build of an Aphrodite of Capua. But glance at Pati, sitting by my writing table with two of her sisters! Did you ever see anything as lovely as this child? Pati may be even more beautiful than Desire, and that is compliment enough. Like Desire, she has a soft, husky voice and a natural antipathy to raising it above a murmur.

Parson Sea Foam is one of Desire's relatives. It seems that I am temporarily in his bad graces. Early in the spree, Desire tells me, I was silly enough to question the existence of an anthropomorphic god, and the following Sunday Sea Foam indignantly replied with a rousing sermon inspired by Psalm 14: *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*

First Sea Foam spoke of the kind of people that renounce God; men that delve into the past of dark-minded heathens, exposing shameful things best forgotten; men that drink strong liquor, fall off causeways, and meet loose women in the magnolia bushes. Then, rising to his subject, his podgy arms working as though he were grinding fodder at a hand mill, Sea Foam demonstrated once and for all the existence of God.

"Who makes the rain fall?" he wanted to know. "Who makes the wind blow, the lightning flash, the thunder roar? Who makes the taro grow; I ask you, *who* makes it grow? Who makes the coconut tree come into fructification? Why are men and women born instead of men alone?" At this point Sea Foam gave us a dry little laugh reminiscent of a cheap tragedian being cynical—a sort of "Ha, ha!" that expressed: "So, my brethren, our little atheist is squelched for all time!"

However, squelched or not, Sea Foam ended with a grand *coup de grâce* by stating that many atheists, when death knocks at the door, turn at the last to God and embrace the church. Sea Foam then did some praying and stumped down from the pulpit, convinced that, even though I might not take the sacrament immediately, he had silenced me forever.

Oh well, the startling occurrence that I intended to narrate will have to wait till tomorrow. My brain is distraught. On Matauea Point, Desire's sisters go swimming in *puris naturalibus*, while here, in Tala's house, at this moment Tangi, Vaevae, and Pati are sitting by my writing table, plaiting a pandanus-leaf mat. They are speaking, with Danger Island realism, about love! And because of the way they sit, cross-legged, facing me, their dresses drawn up above their knees—and because they have low-necked dresses on, and plaiting requires that they lean over slightly—I shall close my journal until they are visiting their aunt at the other end of the village.

Chapter V

THE AUGUSTUSES had notified us that on the fifteenth of February there would be a birthday feast at Matauea to celebrate Susanna's unhappy appearance on the mundane scene. This meant nauseous heaps of half-cooked pork, scraggly fowls, tari, and coconuts, with perhaps one of those poisonous things that Susanna calls "cakes." But luckily, at 9 P.M. the night before, a vessel's lights were sighted to southward.

Desire and I saw the lights while we were walking on the outer beach, and, because we were close to Matauea, we hurried there to tell the Augustuses the news—then we leaped back into the shadows, appalled by the scene that followed. Have you ever seen a stampeding herd of cattle "milled"—that is, driven so they move like a whirlpool? That is what our casually stated, "There's a big steamer in the offing," did to the Augustuses. They started milling, noisily, like a panic-stricken herd of cattle. They lost contact with the familiar realities of the Danger Island world.

"Don't forget to ask them for some banana extract!" Mrs. Augustus shrieked while her long-legged, self-important husband rushed to the cookhouse, forgot what he had gone there for, thought of something in the sleeping house, rushed there, then recalled what he wanted in the cookhouse but forgot what he had returned to the sleeping house for.

"And bring some butter ashore by the first boat!" Susanna screamed at her distracted husband. "I got to make them some scones for tea tomorrow, and I got to have butter, because white people would despise us if we didn't have butter, and I know they will despise us, because white people always have butter on their tea, and you'll forget all about the banana extract ... Oh, Horatio, you're such a trial, and here I am now, and can't find your store teeth!" And so on, while Horatio flew panting to the canoe, started stepping the mast, then joined Susanna in hunting for his false teeth, forgot them, and hurried to the end of the point to ascertain that the vessel was still there.

Desire and I, back in the shadows, snickered sardonically.

Somehow—God knows how!—they left Matauea for the main islet at about 11 P.M.; but when they were halfway across the lagoon Horatio found he had forgotten his teeth, so back they came to Matauea, remembered what they had come for, and at 1 A.M. started a second time for the main islet.

Next morning Desire and four of her sisters—Tangi, Vaevae, Pati, and Tili—sailed the Honorable Ropati to the main islet. Araipu was waiting for us on the beach. He told us the strange vessel was H.M.S. *Percival*, and scarcely had he mispronounced the name when the stirring music of a military band came crashing on our ears!

Sons of Adam! We caught our breath! We turned our eyes! Desire

squealed! Tili started crying! Every pig and fowl on the island dashed for the bush! Down the road of Central Village marched a military band!

I was simply flabbergasted—let it go at that!

With a drum major leading, the band marched four abreast. The clarion notes of the cornets pierced the foliage of coconut trees; the shrill piping of the piccolo roused even old Mr. Scratch from his sleeping mat. The umph pom-pom of the tuba caused scores of miscarriages among the village hens quaking in the magnolia bushes. The boom of the big bass drum silenced completely the lonely rumble of combers on the barrier reef! A military band marching down the road of Central Village! Never had such a spectacle been dreamed of. The people were dumfounded. Men, women, and children stared with stupefied eyes, their mouths open.

I came to my senses with Desire standing behind me, supporting me. She said later that she had been afraid I would fall over backward like the man in the comic paper. When the band had passed, the music had stopped, and only the snare drum rattled its tap, tap tap tap, tap-tap tap, Desire had again to support me. Following the band came a crowd of officers and men from His Majesty's ship, led by Honorable Horatio himself, and beside Honorable Horatio a perfectly spherical man, red-faced, perspiring like a tropic squall, continually mopping his face with a big handkerchief from which he would now and again wring the sweat. It was Honorable Tibbitts, I learned later, but even then I knew he was a politician.

A few steps behind Honorable Tibbitts scuttled Deacon Bribery, stubbing his toes and wobbling from side to side, his eyes riveted on the politician's cigar. Deacon knew that soon the precious perfecto would be tossed away, and Deacon was determined to pounce on it before that old fellow Scratch got it.

When the lot of them had passed, Araipu looked at me with an expression of imbecile bewilderment, but he did not trust himself with words. Then we were brought to our senses by Desire, "Come, Ropati," she said in a thin, shaky little voice, "we'll go to the government shed and see what it's all about."

So we walked across the islet to the government residence and arrived there in time to see Honorable Tibbitts shaking hands with everybody, slapping backs right and left, and to hear him saying nice things about the babies, the coconuts, and the island in general. It was like old times: I could fancy myself at a county election in Fresno.

Presently the Danger Islanders gave the foreigners the usual presents of mats, hats, fans, and pearl-shell hooks, and Tibbitts presented the school children with three tins of hard candy. Then Tibbitts made a long speech which Horatio, nervous, stiff, stern-eyed, his ego exalted to the sky, translated. Susanna buzzed about; Araipu pressed his eyeballs back in their sockets; Ropati calmly smoked a cigarette.

The neighbors seemed scarcely aware of the startling events taking place

under their eyes. They stared this way and that, mouths open, brows perplexed. Now and again a Village Father would note some minute personal detail and straightway make a pointed remark, as: "He's got a wart on his nose!" Or Deacon Bribery—as he cut a slice from the dry end of the perfecto and jammed it in his pipe—would mention casually: "His pants aren't buttoned!" Or the roughneck village girls would talk about sexy things, and giggle, and plan how they could make dates with husky sailor boys. But that was as far as their cognizance led them. Luckily only I among the whites could appreciate the exquisite humor of the neighbors.

In Honorable Tibbitts' speech he told us the government was establishing wireless stations on all the outposts of progress. "Aye, even on Danger Island—even now, this very day!" And with a sweep of his stumpy arm he pointed to a heap of packing cases, on one of which sat a flashily dressed native of the Lower Islands, presumably the wireless operator.

"Wireless telegraphy will be a great blessing to the palm-encrusted isles of the Southern Sea," Tibbitts told us, "a great blessing to the brown brothers, so happy, so free from the trials and tribulations of the outside world!" Smiling beatifically, Tibbitts stated that the government had donated thousands of pounds to send this great and beautiful warship. "And even now," he claimed, his voice bathetic, "your white brothers are tossing on their sleeping mats, harassed over the plight of the poor Danger Islanders, so happy and free from care, who have no wireless communication with the outside world. But your white brothers will weep with joy and relief"—and here Tibbitts shed a tear by way of illustration—"when they learn that even the last outpost is blessed with that marvelous creation of the intellect of modern man—wireless telegraphy!"

Through force of habit Tibbitts paused here to give the neighbors an opportunity to applaud, but as none of them had ever heard of that manner of recognizing forceful oratory he covered his confusion with an "Ahem!", delivered another neat peroration, and then followed Horatio to the banquet hall.

He had to pay for his blarney by eating great gobs of Susanna's nauseous birthday feast, but there was a spark of heroism in him: he ate with a semblance of heartiness and even made an after-dinner speech in which, incidentally, he repeated his former one.

The neighbors were regaled with music, but it did not harmonize with the primitive background. The stirring march, the seductive waltz, the frisky mazurka made us laugh. We felt a sort of vicarious humiliation because of the humiliation we believed the bandsmen must be feeling, and because of this we gave each musician a pandanus-leaf hat as a solace for his failure to lift us on the wings of song.

While the band played, the politician drank tea and shook hands, the Augustuses dashed every which way without the slightest idea which way they were dashing, I assorted some of the mail and made the acquaintance of

Puré, the wireless operator. Then the navigating officer of *Percival* suggested that I go aboard with him and “have a spot.”

Now, “friends” have been quoted as stating that I am both irresponsible and incapable of sustained exertion. These “friends” should have seen me aboard the great warship—after the spot. God knows how I got through with everything. There, being a dentist aboard, I went to him as soon as I was through with the navigating officer. He was a very young and pleasantly ingenuous dentist. Like all dentists, he asked me questions when my mouth was full of things. Why do dentists invariably ask—“What is your opinion of the European crisis?” when one’s mouth is full of lint, mirrors, cotton wool, rubber gadgets, instruments, and fingers? Are they sadists? If so, do they not derive enough vicious pleasure from drilling into nerves and pulling the wrong teeth without adding to their depraved satisfaction by observing the poor fool trying to reply courteously when his mouth is full of things? Barbers have the same nasty habit of asking questions when they are shaving a man’s upper lip or when they have his face swathed in hot towels.

However, this creature was not so depraved as most of them. He worked rapidly. Young and spry, he literally leaped from one end of the cabin to the other. He sprang here for the saliva ejector, dove there for a pellet of amalgam, leaped hither for the novocain, dashed thither for the dental forceps. After an hour of this, when he had removed a few of the properties from my mouth, I managed to mention that the *Percival* might sail while I was still aboard.

At this the very young dentist whisked to the doorway, shrieked, “Steward!” and, when that man had appeared, shouted. “Dental Surgeon X sends his respects to the commanding officer and requests that *Percival* delay sailing a half hour. Very urgent dental work!”

That’s the way we are on the outposts of progress. It is nothing at all to have one of His Majesty’s ships held up for half an hour while we get a tooth filled.

When the dentist was through I asked for the bill, but he waved the detail aside. “Quite all right!” he cried. “Always glad to be of service to men on the outlying islands!”

Percival did not delay sailing on my account, for, back on deck again, I saw a fleet of canoes crossing the reef and shallows, with Honorable Tibbitts bulging over the gunwales of one of them. I realized that there was no time to lose if I wished to buy any provisions, so I got a sailor to lead me to the canteen, and there, with sweeps of the arm, I cleaned the place out. Then I bought a great heap of provisions from the victualing officer, exchanged three hundred dollars into British currency, cadged some medicine from the doctor, sat drinking and yarning in the wardroom, and was presented with a case of whiskey by the officers of His Majesty’s ship. When finally I was helped to the accommodation ladder I was in the condition any South Sea trader should be in when one of His Majesty’s ships is in the offing. I rolled into Araipu’s

boat; we gave three rousing cheers for the King, the Queen, the British Navy, and Honorable Tibbitts, then we started for shore, with Horatio in another boat, abeam of us.

I was sober enough to see that Horatio was peeved. He reckoned he had not shined; a trader had taken the wind out of his sails; Ropati had bought a boatload of provisions, including many cartons of lollipops, and, worse, Ropati had acquired two amalgam fillings in his front teeth—fillings that the maidens would examine and admire for months to come—while he had managed to beg and buy scarcely anything. But I was tight enough to laugh off his sour looks. I told him he had made an indelible impression on Honorable Tibbitts; that undoubtedly the newspapers would contain columns and columns about the efficient way the resident agent of Danger Island had handled with deft and sure hands such a big problem as *Percival's* unexpected arrival had created. In fact I kept tossing bouquets at Horatio all the way to the beach at Yato. Also I promised him a pair of manowar shoes, a bag of onions, and a carton of lollipops, whereupon he condescended to forgive me and, tacitly understood, not to arrest Desire again, as he is always liable to do when peeved at me.

So I rolled up the beach, rolled through Leeward Village, rolled on to the causeway, and rolled into the fishpond, to the complete gratification of the villagers (the rescue gang), who had been waiting impatiently for several hours. The gang escorted me to the trading station, where Desire and her sisters were waiting for me with a dry suit of clothes laid out, and where my boatsmen were storing the warship provisions.

Desire—the dear!—likes to see me happy now and then. It breaks the monotony of atoll life; it transforms me from the strong, silent man whom she obeys but does not understand into a cheerful, whooping youth whom she bosses and understands perfectly. She is wise enough to take charge of the menage when I am reverting to type. This evening she decided it would be unsafe to sail back to Ko, so she herded her sisters into our canoe and ordered them to bend their backs to the paddles.

It was night by the time we had worked our way into the lagoon, but, like myself, the moon was nearly full. Lolling in the canoe, my feet on the gunwales, my cork helmet on the back of my head, I, pausing now and again to refresh myself from a bottle of Highland Dew, made the girls a dozen better speeches than Honorable Tibbitts had made, while betimes sisters-in-law paddled leisurely.

Halfway across the lagoon we were passed by Horatio Augustus, sailing to Matauea with dozens of brats, wives, and retainers. And, incredible though it seemed, five minutes later we were passed by him again, sailing, this time, back to the main islet.

“I want you to keep sober, Ropati!” he called sullenly. “If you get drunk and go running after women, both Susanna and I shall be quite angry!”

“Okay, Horatio!” I whooped, knowing he was merely restoring the last

stones on his defensive wall. Then I yelled: “Why are you sailing back to the main islet?”

Horatio might have lied out of it, but he didn’t. Perhaps he was too peeved to lie. “I forgot my teeth!” he snarled, and the boat passed on into the night.

It must be a Sunday morning! Just now, as I tried to make an entry in my journal, Desire entered silently. My first intimation of her was a fugitive waft of *Tiaré Tahiti* perfume, at first mingling with and then displacing the smell of the moldy trade goods. And I heard her little voice, speaking banteringly:

“*Ongi*, Ropati [Kiss me, Ropati]!”

I knew it was a Sunday. I knew it before turning to gaze at her in all her Sunday-go-to-meeting loveliness: a light blue voile dress with pink roses scattered over it, a white straw hat with a red ribbon, a pearl-shell pendant on a real gold chain, a ring with three cream-colored pearls. Her hair was done up in European fashion, with a wavy lock patted down on each temple; and I could see that she had used powder and rouge for the first time, sparingly and therefore charmingly. Also, there was an underthing of pure silk, and another underthing no less precious; and I knew she wore these things because, childlike, she showed me she was wearing all the presents I had given her.

“You are lovely, Desire,” I said; “but next Sunday I want you to be Miss Memory. Put on your old clothes and we will go for a picnic.”

“Yes, Ropati,” as she leaned over to kiss me lightly lest she spoil her make-up. “*Ongi*, Ropati!” and she toddled off to church.

Concerning Desire’s sister Tangi, I am worried about her. She has a persistent cough and often is feverish at night—yet there is no keeping her from going to the outer beach with her boy. When I hear someone coughing on this island it fills me with dismay, for tuberculosis is our most deadly affliction. Half the deaths are due to it; I have never known of an arrested case. Oh well (again); but this time many people care—Tangi’s boy friend, Desire, and I, among others.

Let me think of something pleasanter to write about.

While the last schooner was here an Adventist missionary stopped ashore, guest of the Augustuses. He was intelligent, witty, broadminded—until he got astride his pet mania, Adventism, when he would lose all contact with solid earthly things.

Desire attended one of the Adventist’s outpourings of the True Faith, and she was greatly impressed by all he said, though she believed not a word of it. A few days ago, recalling the service, she said to me playfully:

“The end of the world is very near, Ropati, so I think we’d better join the Adventist’s Chapel. Next year or may be the year after there is going to be a

terrible explosion, and the world will burst into little pieces! Then all the Catholics and the Missionary Society Christians and the heathens like you and William will tumble down to Hell; but the Adventists will grow wings and fly to Heaven like little white ghost terns or maybe frigate birds!"

Then she went on, her laughter accompanying her words: "Won't it be funny to see that old Adventist Manea fluttering up in the clouds, with his big elephantiac legs swinging back and forth like bags of copra! Or old Mr. Breadfruit, who has elephantiasis in the other place!" And the little realist, throwing herself back on the sleeping mat, screamed with laughter.

Well, the next day I went for my usual walk through the taro beds of the main islet and along the beach to Utupoa; and presently I met the entire male congregation of the Adventist Chapel, led by their native pastor, carrying slabs of coral to build a new church. Recalling the near approach of the millennium, I asked the pastor how long it would take to build the church.

"Oh, maybe ten years," he replied.

"You'd better hurry," I advised. "You'll be worshipping in a golden church before ten years are up. End of the world next year, or maybe the year after."

Because it was a Sunday morning I told Desire to meet me on Utupoa Point when the people were all safely in church; then, when the church bell had sounded, I took my shotgun from its peg on the wall, filled my pockets with cartridges, and started toward the windward reef.

Presently I heard a clapping sound a little to one side of the path, and, on making a detour, soon came to my old friend the deaf-mute Letter. He was chopping down the biggest hernandia tree on Danger Island. It was immense! It looked to be the biggest tree in the world! Particularly so in contrast to hairy little Quasimodo sitting by it, a boy-scout hatchet in his hands. Letter had chopped a tiny notch in one of the twelve-foot buttresses. I wondered if he had been roused by a surge of the masculine protest that Jung writes about so convincingly. I gave him a piece of tobacco, whereupon he made the notch a little bigger; then, more than likely, he went home to wait till next year, when perhaps another visitation of masculine protest might rouse him into giving another whack or two at the buttress.

Dear old Letter! If Desire had not been waiting for me, I should have asked him to come with me to Ko. True, he is a congenital beggar—but not a vicious one. When I meet him there is no mistaking the genuine pleasure that lights up his old eyes or the respect with which he kisses my hand, but a moment later the habit of mendicancy overcomes him and he cadges, by hand talk, anything cadgable—tobacco preferred. Outside his duties as town gossip his principal occupation is cadging tobacco; and, so far as that goes, he makes the two occupations join forces, weighing out, as it were, so much scandalous gossip for so much tobacco. Trotting hither and thither on skinny, crooked legs, his head thrust forward as though he were trying to keep pace with his

beaklike nose, sniffing the air, he follows the odor of tobacco from the Point of Smoking Seas to the Point of Utupoa and the Point of Yato; and if, sometime when tobacco is scarce, we slip to the outer beach to enjoy our pipe, after the third puff we will hear Letter's footfalls crackling through the bush. And when he finds us he will sit by us and gaze at us with the fond and begging eyes of a dog waiting for his bone.

However, having tobaccoed the deaf-mute this Sunday morning, I walked to where the Point of Utupoa ends on the reef highway between the main islet and Ko, and there I found Desire sitting under the big *tournefortia* bush, her back to me.

"Desire!" I cried, as though I had not asked her to meet me for she understands such whimsies. "You here? What grand luck! I am going to Ko Islet, won't you come along?"

"Yes, Ropati," she replied; then, correcting herself: "Yes, Mr. Moonlight. I knew we were going to do some wicked thing on Sunday—but I don't care. I'm your woman now, so I'm a cowboy, like you."

"Now that the Reverend Horatio has gone it won't be wicked," I told her. "You won't be put in jail again." Then, as she rose and stepped to my side, "Come, Miss Memory," I said, "we will escape to Ko Islet and live for the rest of our lives hidden in the jungle."

Then we left the point to walk along the dry brick-red reef toward the far islet. Sometimes I would stop to bring down a curlew or a sandpiper when it came within range, or to light my pipe and suck on it with the relish of a William the Heathen; and as we moved forward, plucking the feathers from the birds, now and then glancing over our shoulders at the main islet growing misty and far away, gradually there came over me a feeling of keen pleasurable-ness. I anticipated with zest the meal of grilled birds, the fresh, cold drinking nuts of Ko, the healing solitude of an uninhabited place.

The first mile was delightful, for the sun was still low in the sky and only the largest waves washed over the outer reef to its inner edge where we walked. In the pools were scores of blue parrot fish. They finned for cover at our approach or, ostrich-like, thrust their heads into the holes and crevices, leaving the greater part of their bodies exposed. We could have caught them with our bare hands, but we left them undisturbed, for there would be plenty of sea food close to the islet.

After the first mile we came to a tiny coconut islet. As often before, it reminded me of the ones pictured in comic papers: a quarter acre of sand, a dozen coconut trees, and a fringe of bush. Only the castaway sailor, his wrecked raft, and his signal flag were missing. There we stopped to pull down drinking nuts with a split frond tied together at its outer extremity and to drink them.

The next mile was over a series of sand cays broken by channels where the waves washed into the lagoon, a foot or two deep, and where inordinately inquisitive, or hungry—I have never been sure which—sharks rushed toward

us, only to be frightened away by a great beating on the water with our staffs. At times even this did not suffice and we must jump from the water when the brutes were only a few inches from our feet.

There was a mile of open reef between the last sand cay and the islet, and now, with the tide coming in, it was waist-deep with flowing water. We started across it, knowing that danger was remote, but aware that, should a shark set his heart on a human meal, there would be short shrift for us. Once blood was let we should have every shark on the reef charging us, for the brutes have some occult means of scenting a good meal though it be miles away.

And the last stretch was through a channel shoulder-deep for me, which means that Desire had to swim. But there the sharks kept at a healthy distance, as they generally do when one is in deep water. Perhaps, seeing more of the man below the surface, they realize that he may turn out to be a dangerous enemy, while when only his legs are visible they see nothing to prevent their enjoying an unusual morsel. But we knew that a shark would mean business should he attack us here.

It was late afternoon when we climbed up the beach of Matautu. There we built a wigwam of palm fronds, close to a copse of *ngangie* bushes; then Desire cleaned the birds and started to grill them and a big coconut crab that had been waiting for us at the edge of the bush, while I went in search of drinking nuts. All the trees thereabouts seemed unusually high, but a quarter of a mile along the beach I found a low tree leaning over the water. I made a strop out of my belt, put my feet in it so the under part of the strop crossed the instep, and jumped on the tree in the native manner. Thus my feet were on either side of the bole while the belt held them firmly against it. I climbed by raising my feet as I clung to the tree with my arms, then gripping the tree with my feet as I straightened up and took another hold with my arms.

There were ten nuts of the right age for drinking, as I knew by tapping them and listening to their sound. These I threw in the water and, climbing down, brought them ashore. When I husked them on a pointed stick thrust in a crabhole, two were broken. I drank what water was left in them, scraped out the tender flesh with my thumbnail and ate it, then walked back to the wigwam.

Desire had cooked the birds to a fine crisp brown, and now the fat from the coconut crab was oozing on the coals, sputtering and filling the air with a savory odor. As it was nearly dark she had built a fire of husks and spathes; it broke the gloom, touched the lagoon ripples with aurean lights, and guided Desire's nimble fingers as she plaited frond food mats for our feast.

Aye, we feasted that night. Desire ate four curlews, and, I enough crab fat to make six civilized men violently ill. We were midway in our meal when Desire motioned to one side where three coconut crabs had crawled into the firelight. They were semaphoring to us with their great claws, while their little anterior prehensile legs worked back and forth toward their mouths,

mimicking us, perhaps, or beckoning for us to follow them into the black jungle to feast on raw flesh and coconut meat, or perhaps intimating that they too could do with a little cooked food. Gradually they approached us, and, by the time we were gnawing the last wing bones they had adopted themselves into the family. We threw them scraps of their fellow coconut crab, which they devoured with the gratitude of cannibals. But when our meal was finished Desire picked up the cheeky crabs and threw them far into the bush, lest they try to share her bed as well as her meal. She had no faith in the integrity of coconut crabs.

Presently we lay on a bed of leaves close to the wigwam, and there we talked desultorily, smoked, and watched the full moon emerge, dull red and enormous, from behind a great heap of cumulus clouds. For a moment the color of the moon bewildered me, then: "Miss Memory! It is an eclipse!" I cried. "Did you ever see an eclipse before?"

"Yes, Mr. Moonlight; when I was a little girl and you were a trader for Captain Viggo. I remember that it was the night of the big dance at Yato Village, and the dance was stopped while the people watched the moon go red with blood, and while old King-of-the-Sky told us the story of Lingutaimoa."

"Tell me the story, Miss Memory—it will be a bedtime story; then we will crawl into the wigwam and go to sleep."

Desire rolled on her side, laid her arm across me, and in her soft, gentle voice half sang, half chanted, in the manner of Polynesian storytelling:

"There is a woman named Lingutaimoa, living on some coral isle in the South Seas. A long time ago she caught a *manini* fish about as big as the end of your finger. She thought the fish was pretty, so she made it her pet. First she put it in a coconut shell full of sea water, and every day she fed it bits of hermit crab. Before long the *manini* fish grew too big for the shell, so she put it in a wooden pod bowl and fed it pieces of land crab. Then, when the fish was too big for the *poé* bowl, she put it in a canoe and fed it pieces of lobster, until finally it was so big she had to set it free in the lagoon.

"But the *manini* fish remembered Lingutaimoa, and every time the woman went to the beach it would swim to her and eat from her hand. This continued for a long time until finally the fish was many fathoms long and as big around as a ship.

"Now, it happened that one day Yina, who lives in the moon, dropped her fishline to the lagoon of Lingutaimoa's coral isle, and the *manini* fish took her hook! Yina pulled the fish up to the moon; she called all the gods and goddesses to her and showed them the fish, and they all danced with happiness, thinking of the big feast they were to have.

"That same day Lingutaimoa went to the lagoon and called: 'Manini fish! Manini fish! Come to her gift-woman! Here is food for you, my *manini* fish!' But though she called and called no fish came. Then Lingutaimoa wept, and she ran through the village, asking first the old people, then the middle-aged people, then the young people if they had seen her *manini* fish; but no one had

seen it save a little child, who told Lingutaimoa that a fishline had dropped down from the sky and the manini fish had been pulled up to the moon.

“When night came Lingutaimoa walked along the beach, staring at the moon, and soon she saw the blood of her manini fish spilling over the surface of the moon until it was red. Then Lingutaimoa knew that Yina had killed her fish. She wept; but next day she went to the lagoon, caught another little manini fish, and made it her pet. When it had grown big Yina caught it too. And so it goes: every few years the gods in the moon cut up Lingutaimoa’s fish—as you can see now, Mr. Moonlight, for the moon is red with its blood.”

Desire ended her story with a sleepy sigh, cuddled close to me, and fell asleep with her head pillowed on my arm; and long before the manini fish’s blood had dripped from the moon I too was fast asleep.

“Who is Mr. Manowar Hawk?” Desire asked me.

She and her sister Tangi were sitting on the back balcony. They had a scrap of note paper before them and apparently were snickering over the words scribbled on it.

“How should I know? I never go to the House of Youth any more, so I don’t know what names the boys take.”

Desire turned to Tangi. “You are sure Ropati didn’t give you this letter?” she asked her sister.

“No, Desire; I told you someone threw it at my feet last night.”

“Where were you?”

“I was walking by the churchyard wall.”

“You weren’t passing under the trading-station balcony?”

“No, Desire.”

“Well, then, it couldn’t have been my Mr. Manowar Hawk... Maybe it was Bribery, Jr.?”

At mention of the crooked-legged grandson of the crooked-legged deacon Tangi turned up her nose in a way that might have humiliated Master Bribery, and she shrugged her shoulders in a way that might have humiliated him still more. Then Desire handed me the note, and I read:

TO MY LITTLE WHITE TERN, MY SWEET-SMELLING LITTLE BIRD:

This letter is a meeting between Mr. Manowar Hawk and Miss White Tern. Is my little bird well, or is my little bird ill? Your big manowar hawk is well, he is not ill.

Oh, little Miss White Tern, why do you let me die of weeping? Fly to me, little bird, Fly to me where I wait for you every night when the curfew rings, behind the churchyard wall.

Oh, little Miss White Tern, I will lure you to my love nest with a bottle of hair oil. Come to me quickly behind the churchyard wall.

Mr. Manowar Hawk

Now at last I have a purpose in life! I must discover what cheeky native buck has lately assumed the fraternity name of Mr. Manowar Hawk. Think of a Danger Islander presuming to make a date with such an exquisite creature as sweet little Tangi!—and Tangi’s cough daily becoming worse! The two of them should be spanked—or, better, in Tangi’s case, put in the hospital.

Tangi is head over heels in love with a brand-new boy, and this in spite of the fact that I am now keeping her at the station and trying to nurse her back to health—hopeless task!

One morning, some weeks ago, I entered the cookhouse less noisily than usual, and there I saw the lovely girl sitting on an empty kerosene case, staring abstractedly into the fire, her hands clasped in her lap in a tense manner, coughing at times. The kettle was boiling away merrily, but Tangi knew it not. The time had long since passed for making coffee, but Tangi’s thoughts were on the “moonlit solitudes mild” of the outer beach. A fine cavalla waited on the table to be fried, but Tangi was still in the arms of her gift-boy. When I had roused her from the state of erotic dissociation I leaned over to ask in a whisper the name of her wonderboy.

“Pio!” she whispered back, with a catch in her breath, and almost burst into tears.

Pio!—Mr. Manowar Hawk, formerly Mr. Horse, my bosom friend! Big, beautiful, brainless Pio! Pio of the striped pants, the curly hair, the cocolelé, the noble mien!

And now they are to be married!—despite my protest. This morning Desire and I watched them walk past the station on their way to Parson Sea Foam’s house, where they would sign their names in the Big Book. Tangi was clothed in white muslin and Desire’s black shoes. Beautiful, brainless Pio, his cocolelé for a wonder left at home, walked proudly in front of his girl, his handsome figure clad in my best white suit.

“*Pataitai* [How wasteful]!” Desire murmured. And as I stared at the soft folds of muslin over the soft, budding breasts of poor little Tangi I agreed, as usual, with Desire.

Chapter VI

SATYR BONES is dead, and I shall write his obituary on this hideously noisy night in the trading station.

Bones lived to a ripe old age, but he never admitted it. Up to the night before his death his voice was as stentorian as ever: to him a whisper was a mighty bellow that reverberated across the lagoon like a clap of thunder. Though his flesh sagged, it told the tale of a mighty man in the true Danger Island manner: mighty in love and eating. But now Bones is dead.

He was famous for his gargantuan guttlings. He alone of all the Danger Islanders had three native ovens in his cookhouse, and all three were heaped with food every day so the grown-old hero could eat his way through them, with many a hearty belch and smacking noise.

His teeth were a full inch long from gums to tips, yellow-brown, as big as a boar's tusk. Only a few of them had been broken by gnawing thighbones and cracking coconut shells. His cookhouse reminded one of the cave of a Cyclops. Perhaps in future ages a party of archeologists will smell out the site of Bones's cookhouse and will excavate to find stratum on stratum of fishbones, turtle shells, pig skulls, clamshells, feathers, charred faggots; and perhaps the archeologists will write a learned monograph about the large tribe of primitive Puka-Pukans that gorged for many centuries on this particular spot, while in fact Satyr Bones, "alone and singlehanded," built up the great bed of refuse over the span of a few short years.

When the satyr was in funds he would buy a fifty-pound bag of flour, toss it to his woman, and bellow: "We'll have a white man's snack today, old woman! Boil me this bag of flour!"

So the gigantic woman would herd together her female relatives, scores of coconuts would be grated, the meat would be mixed with the flour, and great gobs of the mixture would be dropped into kerosene tins of boiling water. It came out a food solid enough for an army mule—a light snack for big-bellied, barrel-chested, fangtoothed Bones.

Bones's wife survives him. What an Amazon she is! She reminds one of Michelangelo's Cumaean Sibyl—big-boned, muscular, forbidding. One day, when I held out my hand to her, forgetting that she had never heard of that form of greeting, she put a baked taro in my hand! Force of habit, force of habit. When Bones held out his hand it meant only one of two things: food or woman.

It is said that when she was about to give birth to Strange-Eyes she drove everyone away, then braced herself in her cookhouse with her feet against one post and her arms around two others. At the last labor pain she, Samson-like, pulled down the two posts and pushed over the third one. The house tumbled

down, leaving her squatting in the square space between two tie beams and two wall plates, her head thrust through the thatching. Thus she could hear but not see the daughter that had at that instant arrived on the mundane scene. That's the kind of woman Bones left behind him. God forbid that Desire ever become such an Amazon as she.

I left the trading station to go to the outer beach and escape the hideous death chant over the body of Bones. On the way I passed First-Born's house. Six old ladies, sitting under the eaves, broke from their rapt attention in the chant long enough to have grand fun speculating on the probable purpose of my walk.

"Whee-ee!" one of them screamed. "Ropati is going to the outer beach!"

"Whoo-oo!" another crone shrieked. "What will he do on the outer beach?"

"He is going to play *tango-tango*! The Yato girls are waiting for him!"

"No; it is Miss Legs! Whee-ee! Miss Legs, eh, Ropati?"

"Whoo-oo!"

"Why doesn't Ropati take us?"

"Pss-ss!"

"Ropati doesn't like old copra nuts; he likes the young drinking nuts!"

"Luck to you, Ropati! May their bellies swell!" This last being the most complimentary thing that can be said (on Danger Island) to a young man out walking at night.

Though I looked this way and that in the bush and scanned the outer beach, I saw no beautiful maidens, so, with a sigh of relief, I walked to the big *tournefortia* bush close to the shallows, made myself comfortable sprawled on one of its limbs, and rolled a pandanus-leaf cigarette.

For a little while I stared abstractedly across the shallows to where moonlight brought the wall of reef combers in dim relief against the sea and its continent of horizon clouds. I inhaled the fragrant perique, listened to the thunder of breakers, and wondered why it did not disturb me. Were there a man on the reef, shouting, the magic of this night would have been lost.

"Now," I thought, "this would be a fine place to build a little hut. On noisy nights Desire and I could come here to sleep."

Then, as often before, it occurred to me that Yato Point, to westward across the bay from the trading station, would be an ideal place to build a permanent home. It was well away from Leeward Village; there was usually a fresh trade wind from across the bay or the fishpond; it was clean, almost free from mosquitoes, and there was a fine bathing beach. Why suffer in Central Village? My presence was required in the trading station only twenty days or so a year. Why not have the Leeward villagers build a house on Yato Point, a sleeping hut out here under the *tournefortia* bush, and a country place on Frigate Bird Islet? My chest was full of silver shillings and pound notes: why

not spend some of them for the health of my soul?

Then there was Desire to consider. I am firmly resolved to marry her in the very near future, and how nice it will be to lead my bride to a beautiful home—instead of to the musty trading station!

And so my determination was formed. I rolled another cigarette, smoked it slowly, and then, forgetting the death chant in the enthusiasm of a new idea, I walked along the beach, hunting for the trail that leads directly to the station. But I missed it, took the wrong trail, got lost inland, and wandered at haphazard through the bush until suddenly I was halted by the sound of voices.

I moved slowly toward the sound, and presently I saw, in a little glade surrounded by magnolias, a boy and a girl. They were illumined dimly by moonlight slanting over the tops of the bushes. The girl wore a cotton chemise, the boy a *pareu*; there were flower crowns on their heads and gardenia buds behind their ears and thrust at random in their hair. Pagan lovers, they sat facing each other, with the girl's legs thrown over the boy's. They slapped their thighs rhythmically and sang a delightfully naughty song for, I suppose, the frankly avowed purpose of exciting themselves.

Staring at them, I became filthily jealous. I wondered if a ghostly noise or a fiendish howl would scare the lovers away, and, when they were separated, if I could catch the girl. William had done something of the kind in the old days, I recalled. Then I remembered Desire and the palace I was to lead her to.

When I climbed up the beach of Frigate Bird Islet the people were waiting for me. "Life to you, Ropati!" they shouted, while one of the young men ran forward with a drinking nut.

I returned the greeting, drank my nut, then beckoned to old poker-playing Mr. Breadfruit and took him aside.

"Now," I said when we were sitting in the lee of his cookhouse and the old gentleman had got his elephantiac things in a comfortable position, "I have made my belly humble, and have come to you, my friend, to ask a great favor. I have come as a child of yours."

Mr. Breadfruit blinked and stiffened for the shock. "Eh, eh, eh!" he muttered, then reached for the tin of tobacco I held out and started to roll a cigarette.

"I intend to marry soon, as you know, and so I wish to build a little house on your land, the Point of Yato. Just a little thatched hut that I can lead my bride to and we can sleep and eat, away from the noise and heat of Central Village."

"Eh, eh, eh!" Breadfruit muttered again, noncommittally.

"So I have made my belly humble, and I have come to you to ask you to let me build this little thatched hut on your land. My wife and I will live in it until we are tired of it; then the house will be yours."

Breadfruit lit his cigarette, smoked, and asked: "You will give the house to no one else?"

"No, Breadfruit; Desire and I will live in it; but when we are through with it we will give it to you."

"Very well, Ropati," said Breadfruit. "Because you are like a child of mine, and the girl you wish to marry is like a child of mine; and because you have made your belly humble; and because you are a stranger with no land on our island, I will let you build on my point. I will make my belly humble even as you have made yours, and let you build on my beautiful Point of Yato."

So that was done. These atoll people will often let one use their land so long as they know that, when one leaves, the land will return to them. They will let one live on their land for a hundred years so long as the land will return eventually to their lineage; but they will not sell outright, and in this they are wise. Long ago I gave up the idea of trying to own land. It can be done on some of the high islands, but on the atolls there is so little land that every inch of it is precious. Yesterday I literally compelled Breadfruit to part with his property. With shameless dissimulation I made my belly humble (*akaaka toku manava*), knowing that Breadfruit would be unable to refuse me, while had I offered him a bag of money he would have turned me down—as already he had done a dozen times.

We called a meeting in the community house, and I put the following proposition to the villagers: I offered to pay them five pounds New Zealand (\$20) a month to take care of all my wants except for clothes and European food. They were to build my three houses, as well as any outhouses I might need, and to keep them in repair. They were to cook my food, laundry my clothes, carry water, chop firewood, furnish a canoe and paddlers to take me to and from Frigate Bird Islet, and they were to allow Desire and me to visit Frigate Bird Islet at any time we wished and stay as long as we pleased. This last was a considerable concession, for the islet is under a strict tapu eight months of the year. But on the other hand five pounds is a large sum on Danger Island, and the people know we will not disturb the sea birds or chop down trees.

They accepted the offer, and will start taking care of me (and, later, Desire, I hope) when they return to the main islet. We will move into the new house when it is built, which should be in about two months.

This morning I made a budget. It seems to me that it represents the minimum on which a white man and his wife can live decently on this island. But to live on this sum a man must have simple tastes: he must not require tinned fruit, jam, butter, asparagus, pork and beans, hair oil. To me it represents a satisfactory life; to another man it would represent dire poverty.

To Leeward Village for food, rent, £5

servants	
The six essentials: soap, kerosene,	2
tobacco, matches, tea, sugar	
Clothes	1
European goods: biscuits, rice,	3
onions, bully beef, typing	
materials, luxuries, etc.	
Total (per month)	£11

The last item can be reduced during hard times, and during very hard times the budget can be reduced to £ 0/-/-, for no man goes hungry on this island whether he be native or white.

This budget gives one of the reasons why I refuse to return to civilization. Here I am rich enough to indulge in marriage, but I would be a pauper in my own home town.

Here at Puka-Puka, even though I become penniless, I shall eat, sleep under a roof, be clothed, have a mistress or a wife, an occasional bottle of *mangaro* beer, numerous servants; but with my assured income of fifty dollars a month I correspond on this island to a millionaire in civilization. I am fabulously wealthy; my income is as great as the combined incomes of my six hundred and fifty neighbors! I have many servants: a washerwoman, Mama as head cook, a pretty little housemaid and often several of her sisters, two fishermen, two women food gatherers, two assistant cooks, two youths to climb coconut trees, gather firewood, carry water, paddle my canoe, and William the Heathen as my private bard and comedian. Of course one person could do all this work, but why should he? I do not have to feed any of my servants; I do not have to clothe them or house them; and their wages come out of the five pounds a month I pay to Central Village but will soon pay to Leeward Village. Moreover, these people like to work in pairs, and they are apt to throw up the sponge and sneak off someplace to sleep if there is too much to do. Old Mr. Scratch, for instance, said to me the other day: "My work today will be sharpening my knife." He took the whole day at it, too!

It is to my increased prestige and therefore to my well-being to have many servants. The more I have the more I am looked up to as a superior person, and the more I am looked up to the simpler it becomes to get things done quickly and cheerfully.

But no matter how wealthy a man is, how simple his tastes, or how wisely his budget has been prepared, he can live happily in these islands only if he retains his status as a white man. He *must not* go native. It is a pleasant thought to dally with in civilization, a disastrous one to put into practice. When a white man goes native the people brand him as no better than themselves. Now, probably he is no better; but if he goes native he will not be as good, and he will find that soon the natives look down on him. Why shouldn't they? He cannot compete with them in their own culture: he cannot

catch a fish as well as they, climb coconut trees, build a canoe, or catch a turtle. If he tries to do these things he makes himself ridiculous: plainly he is inferior to the natives. But he can, by living as a white man, prove his foreign culture to be, in many ways, superior to the native culture, and this he should do. I do not mean that he should dine in a dinner jacket and sleep in a brass bedstead, or that he should refrain from a fishing excursion or a turtle hunt: I mean only that in his general attitude toward life he should remain true to his race.

Natives want to be proud of *their* white man—as they call a South Sea trader like myself. They are disappointed when their white man does not live up to expectations. They want to admire him, brag about him, serve him in the grand manner—and glow themselves from his reflected glory.

Fifty-eight men and fifty women worked six days, and on the seventh day they are resting—today. Result: the best house on Danger Island. It is so beautiful that yesterday evening, when I was walking back to the station, I nearly fell off the causeway through craning my neck around to stare at it from different angles and perspectives; and when I got to the trading station I took out my binocular to gaze at the house from the Central Village beach. The neighbors claimed I was staring at the lovely Yato maidens. Devil take them! These low Danger Islanders habitually interpret my innocent acts into the language of sex—the only language they know.

I must tell about building the house. Monday and Tuesday the young men gathered material while the old men sat by the house site braiding and laying sennit, a mile or more of which was needed, for it takes the place of nails in a native house. Pandanus trees were cut down by the score, the trunks trimmed, barked, and carried to Yato; some six hundred dry coconut fronds were gathered for roofing sheets and sunk in the shallows where the salt water would soak into them and preserve them; the wattling was cut from the aerial roots of pandanus, barked, split, and stacked to dry.

These aerial roots have the appearance of broom handles. They are straw yellow but vary enough to lighter and darker shades to give a pleasing effect. Also they have a dull polish and markings similar to bird's-eye maple. The roots are split in halves, then cut the right length so they will fit between the house posts, their ends wedged in grooves, and with two parallel sticks seized on their inner sides. The general appearance is that of closed window shutters, each wattling overlapping the one below it; to form a wall tight enough for this climate. Rich men improve the appearance with a coat of coconut oil, but never with paint, for it gives a garish effect. Finally, boring insects never attack pandanus wattling as they do the bamboo walls of Tahiti.

On Wednesday and Thursday there was still no actual construction. The old men continued braiding and rolling their sennit, doing a good deal of gossiping betimes, as much smoking as they could afford, and frequently

laying off for a few hours' sleep. The women plaited the fronds into roofing sheets. The younger men chopped out the wattling grooves and made numerous mortises for window sills, posts, and such things.

Each afternoon at about two o'clock a score of men stopped work to take my fish net to the reef and catch a thousand or so needlefish, while the village boys went to the food reserve for five hundred drinking nuts. This food was divided after the day's toil was done. Fires flared up around the house site; the air became heavy with the nidor of grilling fish; the honest laborers relaxed and became noisy.

Friday was the spectacular day, so I watched the work from dawn to sunset, sitting by old Mr. Scratch most of the time, talking to him as I watched the house rise with the magic of an Aladdin's palace.

Though I speak the native tongue as well as does Mr. Scratch, he has the notion that, because I am a white man, I have only the sketchiest knowledge of his language, and this despite his hearing me interpret for government officials, sing native psalms, and, when the home-brew is flowing, give long and detailed accounts of my adventures in distant lands. "White men cannot speak Puka-Pukan," is one of our popular delusions, ranking in second place to "There are no mosquitoes on Frigate Bird Islet," and being about equally popular with "Ropati is no fisherman!" The cows!

Well, it's no use getting peeved: let the silly animals have their silly delusions. Today, as I sat by Mr. Scratch, our conversation went as follows:

"*Walé lelei—lelei walé* [House nice-nice house]?" the old gentleman asked, repeating his sentence, with the words reversed, for the sake of clarity.

"Yes, it is an excellent house," I replied. "I note that they are fixing upright wattling under the window sills. Will that be satisfactory?"

In Monsieur Scratch's opinion my question was too difficult for a white man to ask, so instead of a reply he asked: "'*Wawiné lelei—lelei wawiné* [Woman nice-nice woman]?" Then, to ascertain that I had understood him, he pointed to Mrs. Little Sea, who was on the lagoon beach, and, putting the palms of his hands together, he laid his stubbly cheek on them, closed his eyes, and snored; and then, glancing at me meaningfully, he asked: "*Lelei? Wawiné? Moé?*"

"Perhaps," I replied testily, "for a certain type of low person it may be pleasant to sleep with a woman."

Herr Scratch grinned and pretended he had not understood me. He eased his shriveled bag of bones to a more comfortable position, and, "*Kai-kai lelei—lelei kai-kai* [Eat nice-nice eat]?" he asked.

So our conversation proceeded desultorily throughout the day, while betimes the men warmed to their work. Up went the posts, the plates, the tie beams; deft and speedy fingers laid the lashings; rafters, battens, and secondary rafters were seized in place; slowly the wattling filled the spaces between the posts. There was the clang of bush knives, the thud of axes, the bang of hammers; there were the screams of women, the undisciplined

whoops of honest laborers—for on this atoll each acceleration in speed must be accompanied by a rise in the volume of yelling. My capable craftsmen suffered from no inhibitions: their yells resounded over the calm water like the panic-stricken cries of a routed army. By the time the thatching was being laid, men, women, and children were bellowing in one sustained hullabaloo, and even Mr. Scratch and I were voicing a few lusty whoops. This may sound like a hyperbole, but it is nothing of the kind. “I speak only truth!” (as the missionary affirmed after describing the creation of Eve). The noise was so uproarious that I could scarcely hear the noble Scratch wheezing in my ear: “*Monomono lelei—lelei monomono?*” which same I shall not even bother to translate.

The construction was finished on Friday. Saturday—yesterday—the men carried white coral gravel for the floor, while the women plaited fifty frond blinds for the windows. Also, the men built a cookhouse and a bathhouse and dug a pit for rubbish. Finally my cheerful and industrious laborers cleaned up the mess incidental to housebuilding.

In the evening we had a grand feast. I had bought a pig weighing two hundred and twenty-one pounds. When he had been unhooked from the scale beam a score of the bright young scholars from Horatio’s school tried to calculate how much I should pay at threepence a pound. Using sticks, they covered the sand with calculations, multiplying by three, then dividing by twelve, and twenty. Each of the score of mathematicians arrived at a different sum, so, once again to demonstrate the white man’s superior intelligence, I marked on the sand:

$$221 \div 4 = 55/3 = \text{£ } 2/15/3$$

Then, to shame the despicable Scratch, who had been standing behind me whining, “*Puaka lelei—lelei puaka* [Pig nice—nice pig]?”, I gave the assembled villagers a lecture on advanced mathematics.

While the pig was roasting in a huge native oven the women prepared great heaps of taro, some of the young men took the net to the reef, and others went to the food reserve for a thousand drinking nuts.

The food was spread before the community house at dusk. Tapipi made a speech, Uncle Scratch said, “*Kai-kai lelei—lelei kai-kai?*” and then I delivered a short but witty oration. Finally Luluia & Co. gave us an extemporaneous dance, and the food was divided, each person’s share to be taken to his home and eaten in privacy. Nice custom! These atoll people seldom gather round the festive board, as we do: they consider eating a vulgar though pleasant occupation best carried on in privacy.

Well, I have already told you that I nearly fell off the causeway. There is only to add that on Monday morning my triclinium will be built (I’ll describe it when it’s done), a door made for the little room where I will store brew and such things, and a few other details attended to. On Tuesday the entire village will come to the trading station, manning the biggest canoes on the island, to

take Desire, myself, and our gear, in the grand manner—with sharkskin drums a-booming and maidens a-bursting into song—to our wattle-and-thatch palace on Yato Point!

My house is beautiful. There is no garish paint to distress the eye. The pandanus framework, the wattling, and the mats are the color of new-mown hay; the blinds and the thatching are russet brown; mats are on the triclinium couches and tables and the shelves where I keep lamps and books and such things. There are dashes of red in the mat designs—just enough to break the monotony. Patches of pure-white coral gravel show here and there on the floor; and, to set off the whole scheme, there is, to the east, a view of the azure-blue bay, with the Point of Utupoa and the Central Village houses a half mile away.

Close to the house is shoal water over white sand. The delicate shades vary under sunlight and shadow, but it is most beautiful when a rain squall comes down from the northwest. Then gusts of wind and rain pass over my house to swirl down to the water, and other gusts hurtle across the fishpond. I can hear them coming from afar; I can see them meet over the blue shoal water and see the sheets of rain eddy and rush away. By Sea Foam's house, where a little point juts into the bay, the tall coconut trees become living creatures, misty now as though a gauze curtain were dropped before them, the rain dense as smoke among their fronds.

Through the open window in the sleeping cubicle—where I am now scribbling these lines, while betimes Desire, dreamy-eyed, nibbles my shoulder abstractedly—I can feel the full force of the trade wind across my face and chest, and I can see it pass its fingers through my gift-girl's hair.

Across the crescent-shaped bay the houses of Windward Village are white in the evening sunlight, but farther back, in the groves, they are scarcely visible. The deep shadows suggest sleep, as do the coconut palms. These last droop their fronds, in deep and dreamless sleep; but when a faint breeze passes over them, whispering a dream image, the fronds stir slightly in their sleep, then rest again as the image passes away.

"I am lost—I am happily lost!" I murmur to Desire. "I am slipping so far from the awareness of the world I live in that the dreaming palms are more real to me than the men and women of my own blood."

I can see also the Central Village houses strung, along the head of the bay, the nearest one, three hundred yards away, being the coral-lime residence of Sea Foam. Two of his daughters, dabs of red and blue calico, move back and forth between the cookhouse and the parsonage. Some days, when the light is such that they can make me out, they wave their hands; and if it is calm I can hear their laughter, or if the night is calm I can hear the parson singing psalms.

From Sea Foam's house the causeway leads to the beach close to the back

of my house. By craning my neck a little I can see the whole length of it. Like the Lady of the Lake, I can watch the villagers passing, to and fro—women with baskets of taro on their heads, their bodies straight and supple; men with bunches of green coconuts and strings of fish; youths with cocolelés, their arms around their gift-girls, gardenias in their hair; a group of youths, marching slowly, singing ... what is it? I seem to have heard it long ago, in a grand opera, when a chorus of soldiers marched on the stage shouting an arrogant paean. On Sundays, going and coming from church, the villagers pass along the causeway in single file. The whole length of it is animated by bouncing, jogging, swaying figures in white drill, blue denim, khaki, calico, muslin as colorful as the dawn; in hats native and European, derby and straw; in shoes white, black, and yellow, but principally no shoes at all. I can watch them coming from early morning service, and betimes I can sip my coffee and wonder if the dawn, which I had been staring at a moment before, has not become materialized in the costumes of my neighbors.

On Friday afternoon Parson Sea Foam, Vicar Araipu, and Heathen William came to the housewarming. There was no one else save Desire, her sisters, and my numerous menials, which last appeared at regular intervals to smilingly refill our pewter mugs or to pick up the thrashing cavallas that I tossed over the heads of my guests and through the doorway.

Araipu, being a devil-may-care vicar, reclined with me on the triclinium's cast couch in the best Roman manner. Reverend Sea Foam, however, felt it beneath his dignity to eat accumbent, so he compromised by heaving one of his great elephantiac legs on the south couch. William sprawled all over the west couch, while Desire moved between the main house and the cookhouse, directing her sisters and the servants in the ways of a European-Roman-South Seas establishment.

"This is a strange house," Araipu said, "It is like one of those tents Abraham used to live in. It is undoubtedly the strangest house on Danger Island." His eyes contracted to pin points, as they always do when he is deep in thought; then he grinned, and, "Here's the text for the house," he said: "*Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars ...*" Proverbs 9: 1."

That's the way with the atoll preachers: they find texts for everything. The text seems to give a sense of completeness. Any sin is venial if the sinner can find a text to excuse it (an easy task); a righteous act is insignificant until it has been pointed up with a Biblical verse. This evening Sea Foam was not to be outdone by a mere vicar. He hipped and hawed for a little space, cleared his throat very audibly, blinked a dozen times in rapid succession, and intoned

"This is the foundation: '*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*' Genesis 1: 1. And this is the interpretation: '*The carpenter stretcheth out his rule; he marketh it out with a line; he fitteth it with planes, and he*

marketh it out with the compass ...’ Isaiah 44: 13.”

Araipu seemed peeved that the parson had outquoted him, but just then a file of slave girls appeared with platters of roast pig; fish grilled, boiled, baked, and raw; grated drinking nut with *uto*; and scores of lobsters, crabs, and shellfish.

We feasted as in the days of Trimalchio and Fortunata, We washed down great hunks of fat pork with great goblets of Extra Special Housewarming Brew. Sea Foam let out his belt; Araipu chewed with his mouth open; William belched and grunted over his guttling. The parson mentioned Joseph feasting his brethren in Egypt; and from William there was an account of a carousal on the Barbary Coast; and from Araipu there was a long narration of the feast of Belshazzar (Daniel 5) right to the *mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*, which last words were whiffled on us in a shower of fishbones and other refuse from the vicar’s mighty feasting.

It was dusk when we were gorged to repletion, but a dozen tiny lanterns, hanging from tie beams and rafters, converted the house into a gnome’s grotto lit up for a wedding; aye, for it was then that I arose to announce the big event of the party.

“Now, Sea Foam, Araipu, William,” I said, catching hold of Desire and putting my arm around her, “we are not here solely to feast. Far from it. There is to be a marriage ceremony tonight. All the best authorities—the sky pilots and the officials and such people—tell us that it is sinful to live with a woman unless the bonds of marriage have been tied. So Desire and I are going to be married. Marry us, Sea Foam!”

“Marry?” the parson queried, his mouth open and his eyebrows raised in a perplexed expression. “The Big Book, Ropati—you haven’t signed your name in the Big Book. You haven’t paid your seven and sixpence for the license, and I haven’t published the banns in church!”

“Sea Foam,” I cried, in half a rage, “you can take all your Big Books and licenses and banns to the devil. Desire and I are going to be married tonight . . . William, marry us!”

“Sure t’ing!” William cried, as though he had been waiting for the order. Then suddenly he became very serious for such an old sinner. He rose, assumed a huffy attitude, threw back his shoulders, cleared his throat with a startling detonation, and, glaring under his beetling brows, he asked me:

“Do you want this here woman?”

“Yes,” I said resolutely.

William scowled, cleared his throat again, and, “Well, that’s finish!” he stated. Then he jerked his head toward poor little scared Desire. He eyed her in a diagnostic way and asked: “Do you want this here man?”

“Yes,” she gasped in the feeblest of voices.

“You’re lucky!” William declared, then went on: “Do you take this here man for your wedded husband?”

“Yes.”

“Will you cook his food, wash his clothes, take care of him when he’s sick?”

“You won’t throw things at him when he’s drunk, or go running after native bucks, or steal his tobacco for your bloody relatives?”

“No.”

“Hm! That’s what you say! Well, you’re married, I reckon!”

William turned to Sea Foam and Araipu. “How ‘bout it?” he asked in a bellicose tone brooking no protest. “They’re married, ain’t they?” And then, with a great guffaw, as though suddenly relieved of the need to be serious: “Sure t’ing they’re married—spliced as good as any landlubber of a sky pilot could splice them! ... Here you, Ropati, damn you, open another bottle of beer!”

The slave girls brought a fresh supply of brew, and we settled down to talk of the things that South Sea hard-doers talk about: women, the price of copra, pilgarlics, distant ports of call, and incredible adventures. The waning moon had risen above the windward point when finally I got my guests precariously treading the causeway homeward.

The wedding guests have gone; I am alone with my little family, lying on the east triclinium couch. The waning moon shines on me through the open window, and I am drunk with a headier wine than that of the wedding party.

Am I mad tonight? Is it the moon shining on me or is it the wine of love? I fancy myself floating peacefully, without resistance, on the stream of events; and perhaps I fancy this because Desire and I went to the outer beach to sleep last night. In the little hut under the *tournefortia* bush I had used no resistance: I had not warned my self that I should not go too far. No; I let myself drift as improvidently as a toy boat on Niagara River; and I toppled over the falls in the arms of Desire; and I stared into her eyes and fancied I was gazing at a pagan girl of ancient PukaPuka! Strange, how these atoll girls give me the impression of women of long ago!

Last night was a recapture of the night when Desire had lain half naked by a magnolia bush on Teaurna Point and I had stared at her, amazed that such a beautiful creature should exist, feeling a sense of guilt that I should possess her—a sense of guilt for which I can thank my sanctimonious father, who impressed in my mind that all pleasure is evil What am I writing about, anyway?

I am degenerating. Like the universe, I am running down. Thank God I have company—that is, Desire and the universe. No longer do I stand braced in the Stream of Duration, my loins causing the eddies that Bergson likens to evolution. Nay; Miss Memory and I drift with time into the space of which we know nought and care less. How silly for man to struggle in a different direction from the natural course of events. Man is, in the last analysis, the slave of his environment. He only chafes his ankles by fighting his fetters.

And oh, when a man is able to put aside his childish ambition, and go to a South Sea atoll, and eat coconuts, and love Desire, then it is so satisfying to simply drift, splitting his infinitives, down, down, down into the Happy Valley of the Forgotten One.

The moon has risen above the eaves: the moon madness soon will leave me. Three stars hang like tiny lanterns an inch or two below the line of thatching; and, by looking southward through the big open window, I can see the Centauri glinting above the trembling lagoon.

Someone is laughing. Albeit I can see no one passing along the causeway — for there is a background of dense shadow—I can see movement. I know not how else to express it. Though it is close to midnight the *himene* singers are yelling lustily, but they are scarcely audible on Yato Point. The reef combers, breaking over the cavern entrance to the Pagan Underworld, sound like a freight train rumbling through a tunnel. I can smell the scented coconut oil on the body of Miss Memory.

Little Tili lies on the triclinium couch beside me. She is fast asleep, and so is Vaevae, who has occupied my sleeping cubicle, and Pati, who is piping off the watches close by on the lagoon beach. Desire is flung out on the sleeping mat in the center of the room. Above her half-clothed body hovers the soul of a pagan girl; the eyes of her man feast on her from the triclinium couch. All's well with the world of Danger Island.

Chapter VII

ARAIPU'S flat-bottomed boat is eighteen feet long, five wide, and has three ironshod keels, which enables it to sail into the wind after a fashion. I have rigged it with a sliding-gunter sail. Yesterday evening I bundled the household gear, the woman, Pati, Tili, and Maloku's two-year-old daughter Rachel into the boat, locked the trading station, and set sail for Frigate Bird Islet with a fresh beam wind. We were bound for the new house Leeward Village has built for us on Puipui Point, there to await Desire's parturition.

The sun set about the time we were abeam Utupoa Point, but there was a full moon which would light us across the lagoon, and we had Pati in the bows to con us through the reefs, crying, "Upwind, the coral head!" or "Down-wind, the long reef!" as cheerfully as any homeward-bound sailor. When we were out of the bay the wind shifted slowly ahead, but this did not trouble us, for by now the moon was a big yellow lantern hanging from our masthead, lighting the lagoon as we plunk-plunked on the port tack and plunk-plunked on the starboard tack.

Desire sat on the floor battens, round as a pumpkin, the very symbol of justification for existence in spirit and body, as contented as a fat old Chinese mandarin after a banquet. To me there is something fine about pregnancy. Desire's swollen body does not shock my aesthetic sense. I love to lay my hand on her, feel the child stirring, and muse on the strangeness of life. And the rest of her body, with the face chubby and the angles rounded off, is lovelier than that of a slim girl. My sense of beauty may be colored by sensuousness (not by sensuality), but nevertheless there is at least something homely, and human, and satisfying about a pregnant woman.

Pati kept a bright lookout forward, but Rachel went to sleep with her head on Tili's lap, while the latter tried to keep awake, for I had told her to guard her little niece against the moon-cows that swoon about on a night like this; but presently the rhythmic slatting of the ripples, the plunk-plunk of the boat, the sonorous voice of Ropati-*tané* singing "Clementine" was too much for her. She slept jackknifed across Rachel until Desire straightened them out so they would not smother each other. Then Desire too (bless her!) nodded and slept, while betimes Papa Ropati, the steering oar held firmly in his hand, his head thrown back in a noble way that only the moon and stars could see and appreciate, shifted from "Clementine" to "Wake Nicodemus" and then to "Lizzie Gurney."

At Puipui Point I drove the boat's stem into the sand; then Pati and I carried the gear into our new house, laid out sleeping mats, pillows, and quilts, and finally carried the three sleeping nuisances to the house and put them to bed. Only Desire knew, with the dulled perception of a pregnant

woman, that she had arrived. She nibbled my shoulder as I carried her, and she sighed in a manner rich with sensuous contentment.

Before sailing I had left word with William to keep a sharp lookout every night, and if he saw three torches flaring on Puipui Point to come quickly to my aid, for it would mean that Desire's labor had started. As for women—midwives and the like—I would not have the creatures about. In fact we came to Frigate Bird to escape unclean and meddlesome old women with their superstitions and their native nostrums, and stupid men who insist on a long prayer as soon as the child has dropped. I have seen newly born babies lying on the birth mat, without any attention whatsoever being shown them, while the damn-fool fathers prayed fully five minutes. It is remarkable that there is so little mortality at birth.

My infant will come into the world with the most expert obstetrical aid on Danger Island. Her back will be slapped; silver vitellin will be dropped in her eyes; the umbilical cord will be neatly cut and ligated; the nuisance will be bathed in smell soap; the belly will be bandaged, and the backsides will be spanked to show her from the very first what she must expect from this weary world of care; and finally Papa Ropati will drink a bottle of Special Obstetrician's Brew and crow like any successful rooster.

Desire has been frightened by no warnings of the dangers of parturition. There have been no kind, sympathetic friends to work her into a state bordering on hysteria—so that when she has her baby she will be capable of feeling only fear and pain. She seems to be in a spiritual state that uplifts her above such things as pain and makes her ignore danger with a fine gesture of contempt. She wants to be left alone; she senses, I believe, that a companion will somehow diminish the feeling of spiritual exaltation. Perhaps it is much the same as my wish to be left alone when I am reading *The Eve of St. Agnes* or when I am lying on some lonely tropic beach, staring across the barrier reef and the sea. I feel something that I cannot express to another person, that I do not wish to express, that I wish to enjoy alone.

Each afternoon for the past week Desire and I have spent a few hours in the lagoon with Rachel, Tili, Pati, and the yet-unborn daughter that is kicking lustily in her mother's womb. Like all atoll mothers, Desire believes the cool water will make her child strong and clean-skinned.

At Puipui Point the lagoon shelves off steeply to three or four fathoms; and from there on, all the way to the main islet, it is studded with coral mushrooms and crisscrossed with reefs. You can swim for miles, from coral head to coral head, and never be more than a hundred yards from some sort of pinnacle or reef on which to rest. And you will have no trouble in finding your way stations, for the water is crystal clear. On an atoll, where there is no river mud, you can see bottom at ten fathoms. What a contrast to San Francisco Bay, where you cannot see bottom at ten inches!

Because Rachel is just learning to swim I carried her. We waded through the shoal water and swam to the first coral mushroom. Rachel was no problem, for she has learned to let her body go limp in the water, do some kicking, and make divers whooping noises instead of climbing on my head. Presently she was placed on the mushroom, in about a foot of water, while Desire, Tili, Pati, and the unborn daughter perched beside her, comprising the audience.

For a little while we did some deep diving to bring up handfuls of sand, thus proving we had been to the bottom; and when slyly I filled Rachel's hands with sand she ducked her head under water, then, sputtering, bright-eyed, she showed us the sand and shrieked that she had been countless fathoms down. She believed it, too, for that night she gave a fisherman a long yarn about it and called on Desire as a witness.

Presently I had forgotten the audience. I swam from coral to coral; I dove into dark and tortuous submarine canyons and poked my head into caves mysterious and black as the days before Genesis; I porpoised under beetling cliffs and wormed my way through crevices and fangtoothed holes, far below the surface. I fancied myself a fish, an eel, a turtle, and to substantiate the illusion I slithered through the water in fish, eel, and turtle manner. I fancied myself a glaucus, and straightway rolled myself into a ball to find out what it was like. I fancied myself a lobster, and tried swimming backward, but only to fill my nose with water. Then, going through a billion years of evolution in a second, I fancied myself a bewhiskered oceanographer observing the coral polyp.

In some places there were flat stretches of brick-red coral such as you find on the reef; in other places the coral was gray and probably dead; and in still other places there were great forests of antler coral, pale yellow and delicate, stippled by the varicolored mantles of tridacna clams. But the most beautiful were the lichenlike growths clinging to the coral heads. Their colors were fantastically brilliant and their forms as many as their number. Some growths were corrugated with scabrous brown ridges, while in the interstices was a paris-green substance soft as putty—as I discovered by pricking it with a safety pin used otherwise as a pants button. When I laid my hand on one of these corals it felt rough as a wood rasp, but when I took my hand away and clenched it I found it covered with invisible slime.

Here and there were black-spined sea urchins, shellfish that lived in nacre-lined holes, conch shells, spider shells, cowrie shells half hidden under the coral ledges. There were great beds of tridacna clams, some buried so deep in the solid-growing coral that they could scarcely open their valves. There were mother-of-pearl shells and *pipi* shells, and a great formless shell that darted into its hole with marvelous agility for such an apparently sedentary creature. There were marine hermit crabs, starfish, sea centipedes; and there was a freakish snail that poked out a sort of fluke and hopped an inch or two off the bottom. There were brown, black, and white trepang, the former often as big

as a loaf of bread. When I lifted one to a coral head it spewed out long white filaments like spaghetti—the stickiest substance in the sea. Now and again I would see the head of a moray eel half obscured by the gloom of its cave; often I came upon octopods squatting on the coral lumps.

Yet people claim the atoll scenery monotonous, the animal, vegetable, and mineral worlds meager! Nowhere else have I seen such amazing sights as an atoll lagoon affords in infinite variety.

After returning to the audience I put on my final act by diving to a forest of antler coral where thousands of tiny South Sea demoiselles hovered in azure-tinted clouds. Minnows ranging from the size of a shirt button to that of a shilling, some were shaped like parrot fish, light blue and almost transparent; others were similar to butterfly fish, with three black bands around their bodies; and still others were young triggerfish, or, as it seemed to me, miniature Cubist paintings.

When close to a school of them I waved my arms about, as William the Heathen does when telling lies. The demoiselles flipped into a bush of antler coral, which I broke off and took to Rachel. When I shook it over her cupped hands literally scores of minnows fell out, and also a number of tiny crabs and things that looked like lobsters. Rachel thanked me with excited screams; when I carried her to Puipui beach she had dozens of fish, crabs, and lobsters in each fat hand. Some of these she fed to the tame booby perched on a coconut stump by the cookhouse; others Desire found this morning under her pillow and on her sleeping mat.

Desire has given our daughter a typical native name. I mention this with diffidence. What excuse am I to offer for Ngatokoruaimatauea? You are certain to exclaim: “Ropati! Think of a frail wisp of a girl dragging a name like that through life! Think of her sweetheart whispering: ‘I love you, Ngatokoruaimatauea!’ Think of her angry mother screaming: ‘Wipe your nose this instant, Ngatokoruaimatauea!’” But for such situations there is another name, Florence, and yet another one, Johnny. I believe the daughter will be called Johnny, for I shall refuse even so much as to whisper Ngatokoruaimatauea*, while Desire, try as she does, cannot come closer to Florence than Paloreniti. Doesn’t sound much like Florence, does it? But if you tried to pronounce Ngatokoruairnatauea you might fail quite as badly.

*Actually the fourth child was named Ngatokoruaimatauea—Nga for short and the other three were called respectively Johnny (as above), Jakey, and Elaine.

Desire’s labor started on the twenty-ninth of last month, so we expected Johnny to arrive on the thirtieth. Neither of us was worried. The old lady did a little walking about to speed things up; the old man caught a fish and cooked a meal; the children stared at Desire with genuine annoyance, then dashed off to

do some fancy swimming in the lagoon.

At dusk I put the teakettle on the fireplace and arranged kindling under it so I could heat water in a hurry. Then I made three frond torches, lit them, stuck them in the sand where they would be seen from the main islet, drank a bottle of home-brew, and asked Desire how she was getting along. She replied that the pains were light, and perhaps they were the “false pains” that sometimes precede the real ones by a few days. She asked me to go to my little workhouse on the beach and sleep so I would be rested if she needed me during the night. This seemed good advice, so I drank another bottle of brew, went to the hut, and fell asleep.

Either Desire was being very brave or her parturition was uniquely painless. I slept for about two hours, then was wakened by a scream. I jumped up, knocked my head on the low rafters, tumbled out of the house, and rushed to the big sleeping house. The lantern was burning, of course, so I could see Desire’s gentle eyes staring at me, weary with pain. “It is a daughter,” she said. Then I glanced down and saw that, sure enough, a daughter had arrived.

I asked her why she had not wakened me, and she replied that there had been no need, and anyway she had wished to be alone.

“Ropati! Ropati! What is it?” came just then from Tili, lying with Pati near by.

“A baby girl,” I said.

“Oh,” she muttered, disappointed that nothing really spectacular had happened, and went back to sleep. I attended the baby and the mother.

“Well,” I thought, like a South Sea trader acting true to type, “I think a brew is indicated. Damme, yes! ... Ropati, congratulations! You’ve got a daughter! ... You’re quite a man, Ropati; upon my word you are! ... Have another glass? ... Don’t mind if I do!”

It was only a few moments later that William had something to say about it too. “Bloody hell!” the profane heathen bellowed when he was still far down the path, his torchlight throwing fantastic shadows through the atoll jungle. “Hell and damn! Whas a matta? Come too soon? How many you catch — two, three, half dozens? Oh, Goddamn! You all the same me, too much savvy all the time, oh yes!”

Soon he entered the clearing, threw his torch in the rubbish pile, and approached the house. He gave the sleeping mother and child a glance of feigned contempt; then, seeing the half-empty brew bottle, “Well,” he opined, “maybe-so I come just in time,” and hurried to upend the bottle at his wrinkled lips.

Of course we made a night of it. The lonely groves and jungle echoed and re-echoed with songs, laughter, curses, and gurgling sounds; the sea birds fled from their roosts in the coconut trees; and when dawn broke over Puipui Point, William had worked himself into such a state of enthusiasm that he took as much pride in the child as though he had made it himself. He crawled into the house on hands and knees, his bony limbs grotesque in the mingled

lantern light and the dawn, and for a long time he stared at the child with leering eyes.

For the past two weeks Desire has been seriously ill—pneumonia, perhaps. A week after the daughter's arrival, feeling perfectly strong, she went swimming in the lagoon, and she fell sick a day or so later. At first I was afraid she might not pull through, but now she is convalescing slowly. Little Johnny is being fed on drinking-nut meat and coconut water. It agrees with her, and it is the usual diet when an atoll mother is unable to nurse her child.

Except for Desire's illness we are a happy family. William is still with us, and Pati, Tili, and Rachel spend a good deal of their time on the point. Mama Tala was here for a few days, but she had to hurry back to the main islet to take care of her other sick daughter, Tangi. Poor child! she is in the last stages of tuberculosis. Before coming to Frigate Bird I was at her house, but I could scarcely bear to look at her, with her big, eloquent eyes moving in an emaciated face that seemed already dead. Pio—happy savage—seemed oblivious of tragedy in his house.

Now that Desire is better, with only a dry cough troubling her, I spend much of my time in the lagoon and sea. I am involuting back to an amphibian, brown as a native, and disgustingly healthy. Often I wish that Desire could absorb some of my health—as Queen Elizabeth believed she could do by sleeping with a virgin. However, yesterday, with tobacco and matches in a waterproof container, a tin for marine specimens, and a sheath knife, I swam leisurely the half mile of lagoon to the west reef.

The water was warm above and cool below, so, paddling slowly, I now and then jackknifed down for a spell in the colder climate. At other times I lay on my back and swam, as Rachel says, "*Pei te poti palala*," which means, "Like a flat-bottomed boat," my arms being the oars. At other times, fancying myself an Olympian champion, I practiced the Australian crawl, the trudgeon, and graceful side stroke, the effortless backstroke. Again, I metamorphosed into a green turtle, swam submerged, with half-empty lungs, and came up to breathe with a raucous intake of air. I have often wished myself a turtle. For calm philosophical detachment, for longevity, for, as Horatio Augustus would put it, "social life" a turtle takes all prizes.

After a dive in the Hot Mineral Baths I moved seaward. The reef was unusually calm, with only an occasional surge, laced with foam, washing up the barrier. Standing by a deep crevice, I raised my hands above my head, palms together in the best textbook manner and was on the point of plunging in when abruptly I drew back, genuinely scared.

Eight or ten feet below the surface was an immense brute as big as a

porpoise! He lay perfectly still, waiting, no doubt, for me to dive. We stared at each other for some moments; then the fish, deciding that I had changed my mind about diving, finned slowly to the edge of the crevice and gave me a mean, impatient glance.

The surge made ripples on the water so I could not see him clearly, but his size alone was enough to terrify me. I sensed that the brute would have no compunctions about eating me, Ropati-tané; it seemed reprehensible in a fish to contemplate eating the father of that remarkable daughter, etc.; but now, as I write this, it occurs to me that I should have felt no compunctions about killing and eating the fish, so I cannot complain.

I scrambled to the top of the reef, pried off a tridacna clam, gouged out the meat, and threw it to the fish. I should like to state that he ate it and gave me a grateful flip of the tail; but he ignored it, while a school of black triggerfish appeared from nowhere to gobble the meat.

Then presently the big fish dissolved in the water in the mysterious way of fish. They do not seem to swim away or sound: they just dissolve. Feeling not so brave as before, I walked slowly toward the Point of Hernandia Trees, picked up a shrimplike creature with claws on two of the middle legs instead of the front ones (silly shrimp!), put it in my specimen tin, and returned to Puipui Point.

The Leeward villagers are now on Frigate Bird Islet, so in the evening I went to the village to tell the neighbors of the big fish; but they dismissed my story with guffaws and told me it was ancient history.

“Even Letter knows about that fish,” Tapipi said, and to prove it he called the deaf-mute. Our speechless gossip then gave me a long account in pantomime, interspersed by wa-wa sounds of how he had been fishing on the reef and how his tremendous brute had taken his minnow hook. According to Letter, he had played the fish long and skillfully. His pole had been jerked downward, heaved up; the line had zimmered through the water; the fish had leaped like a tarpon, plunged, and finally escaped—as Letter signified by spreading out his hands, palms upward, in the Hebrew gesture of negation. But Letter affirmed that he intended to catch the fish, club it, jugulate it, rip open its belly, crunch its skull between his teeth. In fact he became so ferocious in describing the numerous deaths he would inflict upon the poor fish that I made up my mind to catch it myself and kill it mercifully.

While Letter was working himself into a frenzy Constable Ears came in from albacore fishing. In his canoe were seven hundred flying fish that he had picked up in the shallows. They were spawning, fat, and sluggish. Ears reckoned the big fish had chased them onto the reef, but they may simply have been washed up during low tide, for all creatures become silly during parturition. However, the fish were divided among all the villagers, and I salted down my share to be used as bait on the morrow.

Now it is nearly noon. I shall eat; then William and I are going to the reef to catch that big fish. William is convinced that it is a *patuki-wala*, which in

English is a serranus something like a jewfish.

Yesterday afternoon, at low tide, William and I waded through the shallows to the reef, with single prong fish spears across our shoulders, heavy fishlines, shark hooks, and flying-fish bait in our pockets. The combers were higher than they had been the day before, but we managed to dive through them near the crevice I have mentioned. For a little while we peered this way and that, swimming cautiously outward, but we did not see the fish; then we forgot him in the more interesting sport of spearing surgeonfish and exploring the reef shelf. That's the way with a fisherman: he sallies forth to harpoon whales and ends by snaring minnows.

I have told how crystal clear the lagoon water is, how vivid the coral colors. Well, they are not comparable to what is found beyond the reef. In this last place Nature seems to make her final grand splurge of color and outlandish design. If you paddle in a canoe close to the reef you see only dull yellow coral and an occasional uninteresting fish—a blue shadow in the lighter blue water—but if you dive down with water goggles on you become utterly flabbergasted. No other word in my vocabulary describes the state of both spiritual and intellectual amazement. There are literally thousands of fish, everywhere, and scarcely two alike. I recall one little fellow so violently crimson that he shocked my eyes; and a school of spoonbilled violet-colored fish; and butterfly fish with trailing dorsal fins twice the length of their bodies, as soft and delicate as silk, as gorgeously tinted as the butterflies from which they receive their name.

Even under water I could hear the clink of William's spear against the coral as he missed one fish after another. When finally he speared a red-spotted surgeonfish he waved it over his head, sputtering and round-eyed, proud as a child.

As for me, I dove about the deep black crevices and the submarine caverns, full of holy wonder, wishing I could grow gills, disappear forever from the hazardous world of dictators and health foods, inhabit the mysterious sea, the solemn sea ... Why do I say solemn? Perhaps it is because the purple half-light, the mystery of this unusual world, fills me with solemnity, so I transfer my subjective feeling to the objective sea.

Presently I saw two blue spines sticking out of a hole and guessed them to be the antennae of a lobster. I called William, and together we dove down to investigate. First I thrust my hand in the hole, but only to draw it back quickly when the lobster flapped his tail. . "Nevva mind. No get scared," William said when we had come to the surface. "You all-the-same reach in and grab him this-a-way," and thereupon William made a grabbing motion.

"You do it," I countered. "You savvy better than I."

But William reckoned his hand was larger than mine; and anyway, just then a fine school of parrot fish came by, which gave him an excuse to wallow

away, goggle eyes in the water, spear poking this way and that.

I made another attempt to get the lobster, but unluckily I grabbed a knob of white coral to hold myself under, and instantly discovered it poisonous. Once in a while I run into this strange coral. Though it may not scratch, it stings quite painfully and leaves a burning feeling for some time, with a red rash.

However, I had little more than time to realize that I had been poisoned, for suddenly, without warning, I found myself looking straight into the ruthless, bloodthirsty, coldly evil eyes of the man-eating patuki-wala, not more than fifteen feet away!

I was facing outward from the reef, in two fathoms of water. Before me was a great yellow dome of coral, and beyond it hazy blue water fathomless deep. The patuki-wala had risen over this coral dome, looked me straight in the eye, and gnashed his teeth! Mephistopheles rising from Hell could have surprised and terrified me no more. He was a black, hideous, ferocious devil from a barbarous past. He did not belong to this secure world of dictators' and health foods. His jaws spread across his head and down the sides of his body halfway to his tail in a grin inhuman and horrible. I have said that with water goggles on one gets an illusion of gigantic size and vast distance. Well, this patuki-wala looked to me like a large battleship poised over a cathedral.

Pain from bursting lungs finally brought me to my senses. Weak, panic-stricken, sensing that my legs might be crunched at any moment in those awful jaws, I shot to the surface and yelled:

"William! Come quick! The fish!"

The brute made me feel so tiny and helpless that I wanted to cry.

The heathen, thirty yards away, stared at me with the same inhuman detachment as had the fish. "Whas a matta, all the time get scared?" he guffawed. "First see lobster—get scared. Then see little fish—get scared. Oh, you too much get scared all the time, oh yes, Goddamn!"

"The patuki-wala!" I screamed, then ducked my head under water, sensing that the brute was about to swallow me. But he was in the same place, gnashing his teeth, a vile glint in his eyes. He was thinking: "Shall I swallow him now or wait till I have scared him to death?" It's odd how a man, in a state of terror, can read even the mind of a fish.

Swimming backward so as not to lose sight of the brute, I reached William. He made light of the matter, but yet I detected, with a lot of satisfaction, that there was a tremor in his voice when he affirmed: "Patuki-wala no eat you. All the same lobster, he no eat you all the time."

"You get between us," I suggested. "You've got a long, heavy spear and mine's a short, light one. I mustn't take any chances, William. I got a sick wife ashore and a helpless little baby to consider. Just think if Johnny's papa never came home from sea!"

William laughed a little at that and made some asinine remark about the helplessness of Mama; but presently, our courage returning, we swam toward

the brute, side by side, circled round, and even swam down to poke our spears to within a fathom of him. Lord knows what would have happened had we actually speared him. The fish might have eaten us both in retaliation. Old Mr. Scratch once hooked a patuki-wala and was towed several miles to sea before his line parted. That shows how strong they are. Up to yesterday no Danger Islander had ever killed a full-grown patuki-wala.

We did!

It was done this way: We baited the shark hook with a whole flying fish split open lengthways, boned, and turned inside out. This, with half the fishline, I took to a point directly above the patuki-wala, while William took the other end of the line to the reef. I chummed; then I lowered the bait to the fish's nose and lay face downward, watching.

Save for the slow, rhythmic motion of his gill casings, the patuki-wala was as fixed as the yellow coral beneath him. He seemed rigid, and yet I knew he was eying the bait in a dubious way, was smelling or tasting it. I don't know how long I stared at the fish and the fish stared at the bait. Certainly I raised my head dozens of times to breathe. Perhaps ten minutes had passed when suddenly the bait was gone! It was like a conjuring trick. The fish had not moved. The bait had been dangling about eighteen inches from his nose; then instantly it was gone—sucked into his mouth, I suppose—while my fishline, still slack, led between his jaws. It took half a minute to realize what had happened; then, yelling bloody murder, I yanked upward, and then, holding the line for dear life so as to act as a buoy and thus keep the fish from swimming into a hole, I felt myself jerked violently downward.

William, on the reef, was pulling in for all he was worth, and undoubtedly making himself heard from the main islet to Ko. Even I for a little while, until I was too deep in the water, could hear him blaspheming. The patuki-wala was swimming to sea for all he was worth, tending to straighten the line, pull me to the bottom, and drown me. But I held on, and soon found myself moving slowly toward the breakers. It flashed through my mind that at any moment the brute, in a fit of unchristian vindictiveness, might charge forward to bite me. I glanced back, saw he was now over clear coral, then swam to the surface.

For a moment I was so busy regaining my breath that I scarcely saw William doing a sort of ballet dance on the reef, his eyes like toy balloons; but I have a clear recollection of his face horribly distorted, and of how one leg was flung high above his head and was waving back and forth as though to secure his balance, while betimes he heaved on the line as though he were trying to pull a battleship from the bottom of the sea. But William succeeded. He got the fish on the reef and pulled it to a dry patch of coral. When I had reached him he was squatting in a little pool, holding his head tightly in his hands, cursing rapidly and incoherently like a man demented. The look of the patuki-wala was enough to dement any man. His size alone—two hundred and forty-six pounds of Araipu's scale beam was enough to precipitate the

soberest fisherman into a state of frenzy.

I have said that it was the first full-grown patuki-wala ever caught at Danger Island. To commemorate the occasion (or ourselves) we divided the creature among all the villagers. The day before, Constable Ears had been vilely conceited because the people were eating his flying fish; now Ears has “salt water in his eyes” because the people are eating our strange and terrible denizen of the deep.

For the past twenty hours William has been shrieking like the famed mountaineers. Desire and I can hear him now, far away in the copra makers’ village, telling the world of PukaPuka the details of his heroic deed. As for me, I am satisfied with relating modestly that William was deathly afraid of the fish and that he made me do the actual fishing while he stayed on the reef.

“At any moment,” I add, “the brute might have chosen me instead of the bait—but what cared I?” And here I snap my fingers. “Danger is my meat!”

Only the deaf-mute is disgruntled. Letter considers that it was ungentlemanly of us to catch his fish.

Chapter VIII

WHEN A MAN gets in the fishing mood it's no use discussing any other subject with him or trying to set right his sense of values. He wants to catch a fish—preferably a big fish—and that's all there is to it, and that's all there is worth living for. Our savants tell us he is trying to give vent to his aggressive impulse in a harmless way; but what does the fisherman care for all the savants from Sarawak to Samarkand? Whoever heard of a savant catching a fish? What do they know about it, anyway?

Desire knows more about the psychology of a fisherman than all the savants lumped together, and that's because she is the wife of a fisherman who once caught a patuki-wala weighing two hundred and forty-six pounds! Even my daughter Johnny knows enough to look at me with sighing pity—and keep her mouth shut—when I am going fishing.

The other day Desire and a group of her sisters and cousins sat by the doorway of the Yato house, grinning and making sarcastic remarks while busily I fashioned lures for a big fishing expedition to The Rock. First I bought a duck from the lady next door, pulled out a handful of its tail feathers, and let it go; then I cut one of the lead weights from my casting net, punched a bigger hole in it, passed a hook-and-wire leader through the hole, seized on the duck feathers, and had a fairly good jig. Still I was not satisfied. I wanted a spoon hook. I tried to hammer one out of a Chili dollar and was on the point of hammering one out of a ten-dollar gold piece when suddenly my eyes lighted on our big gun-metal soup-*spoon*. I pounced on it and in two seconds had chopped off its handle with an ax.

I scarcely heard Pati scream: "Look at him, Desire! It's the only spoon you have!" And my wife's curt reply: "I've been living with the man four years. He never changes. It's no use talking to him." And then Tili's indecent remark: "And look at the poor little duck, Desire. He can't sit down any more!"

Nothing deters or humiliates a born fisherman. I drilled a pair of holes in the spoon, wired on a No. 10/0 hook, seized a length of piano wire to it, and hung it and the duck-feather jig to a tie beam. Then I got out my fishlines and wound them in neat balls, with the working ends hanging from their centers; and finally I made a huge gaff, which I hung too from the tie beam. By then it was evening; early in the morning we would sail.

The Rock, four miles seaward from Frigate Bird Islet, is a circular coral reef a half mile across, with a small sand cay in its center. It is surrounded by fringing reef where the seas beat heavily on all sides, and it is joined to Frigate Bird Islet by a dangerous sunken reef—Te Arai. To north and south of this reef, depending on the way the current is flowing, a tide rip whitens

several square miles of sea. "Rip" may suggest "ripple" to you, but you must picture this patch of sea as broken by gigantic combers. A few years ago a trading schooner blundered into the rip and was nearly capsized; the captain believed his vessel over shoal water until his lead line told him differently. Probably Te Arai and the tide rip suggested the name "Danger Island" to Commodore Byron when he "discovered" the place in the 1760s.

Danger Islanders who at rare intervals go fishing close to The Rock return home heroes, but once in a while they fail to return. I have made three trips to this perilous place. Each time I have sworn it would be the last; but, as Desire will tell you, no peril daunts a fisherman when the fever is in his blood.

We sailed at dawn in Araipu's flat-bottomed boat, with the vicar at the steering oar, First-Born and myself on the after thwart, William and Poaza forward.

First-Born, the son of Sea Foam, lives next door to the trading station, as I may have mentioned before. About thirty-five, he is tall, well-built, and handsome save for a badly scarred face where he was bitten by a shark. He has a broader outlook on life than have his neighbors, and he is aware of this: he does not hesitate to tell us that, Ropati *perhaps* excepted, he is the smartest man on the island. He addresses one tersely and definitively; he never admits himself in error, and if he is proven wrong he blames it on his wife. She, patient woman, is too fond of her husband to complain. Does he not feed her and her many children? Does he not keep her in a continual state of pregnancy? What more can she ask?

Poaza, son of Bones, is a small, wiry man with sharp interrogative eyes, a leering smile, and a tremendous opinion of himself as an expert fisherman, which in fact he is. Sometimes I wonder if Poaza is entirely human. I fancy him half amphibian—a sort of simian-amphibian. Climbing coconut trees or scuttling bowlegged along the road, he seems more monkey than man; but when fishing he seems more like a wise old penguin. If he is human, it is manifested in his masculine protest. He is vainer than First-Born! He is so sure of himself that, if called the nasty names you can think of or poked fun at till you are black in the face, he will only leer at you and shrug his shoulders as though pitying you for having so imperfect an insight into his sterling qualities. One can no more believe him the brother of Strange-Eyes than one can believe Strange-Eyes the daughter of Bones.

I have told many times of Araipu, and I seem to remember having mentioned the scandalous William. We can continue the expedition.

We crossed the reef at sunrise; then, with a beam wind on our portside, we skirted along the reef toward Frigate Bird Islet. The air was fresh and clear; our spirits were high; the boat plunk-plunked over the waves; William cursed from force of habit; Araipu sang a hymn. Presently Poaza baited his trolling hook with a red mullet and dropped it over the portside. I dropped my duck-feather jig over the starboard side, and—it's a fact!—within half a minute a whale of a fish took it. The line burned through my hands until I took a bight

with it over the thwart; then it parted!

“Nevva mind, oh yes!” William guffawed. “You no savvy lead make him go down quick? Oh hell! Tomorrow I dive down, get him for you!”

The heathen had insinuated that the hook had become fouled in the bottom. The more I see of the profane old man the less I like him. However, I pulled in the line, put on my spoon hook, warned Araipu to keep farther away from the reef, and started fishing in earnest. I ignored the comments of the rest of them, but I could not help hearing First-Born explaining that I should have payed out my line slower, and Araipu opining that we should have offered the customary prayer, and Poaza stating that no white man knows how to catch a fish.

I have to admit that I didn’t catch any fish on the way to The Rock. It was Poaza’s fault: the red-mullet bait on his hook frightened the fish from my spoon. Poaza, however, with his usual fluke of luck, pulled in a few cavallas—but they were thin fish and covered with scales.

Presently we had left the reef and were sailing seaward toward The Rock. A mile to our left, over the sunken Te Arai Reef, black walls of water marched toward us. They were awe-inspiring even at that distance and in the daylight. They didn’t belong out there in the open sea, with no land in the background. Spray rose from their crests to form a low, misty cloud that obscured the horizon; and occasionally, when one toppled over, a geyser of foam and spray would rise, seemingly slowly and deliberately, fifty feet or more to lose itself against the white wall of horizon clouds.

Then we raised the breakers on The Rock’s fringing reef, and soon we could make out the sand cay, yellow and hazy through the spray. Araipu sailed the boat around the fringing reef to bring it into the wind in the lee of the sand cay; the sail was lowered, the mast unstepped, and the sailing gear stowed along one of the gunwales. Oars were shipped, and we rowed close to the reef to drop our anchor. Then we payed out line until we were over fifty fathoms of water, made fast, and sat back for a smoke, a rest, and a prayer.

Seen from The Rock, Danger Island was scarcely recognizable. Frigate Bird and Ko islets were on a line and therefore visible as one islet, with the Point of Hernandia Trees and its cloud of birds closest to us. The main islet, seven miles away, seemed very distant and misty. It did not appear to be connected with Frigate Bird and Ko, for the lagoon and the reef were below the horizon. From The Rock we had the illusion of seeing two distinct islands separated by four miles of sea.

To our right, as far as we could see, the tide rip churned the sea to foam. Directly in front of us twenty-foot combers crashed and roared on The Rock’s fringing reef, and through their spray, only two hundred yards off, yet visible only for short periods between the breakers, the sand cay lay yellow and desolate, a place to depress the spirits of anyone but a born fisherman. Sea birds mottled the yellow sand—often flocks of them soared screaming overhead—and now and again a bird swooped down so close that Poaza tried

to kill it with an oar.

Only a few years ago the sand cay was a luxuriant little islet, inhabited a part of the time. That's the way with these atolls: they're here today and gone tomorrow. One wonders how the people have endured.

The wind freshened as soon as we were anchored off The Rock. William spoke of it and mentioned that it would be a hard pull back to the main islet; then Poaza jerked his head toward Samoa, four hundred miles away, and grinned. First-Born muttered that he had always wanted to take a run down to Apia; but Araipu, the practical vicar, told us to take off our hats while he prayed.

The atoll people are always praying. They never start fishing without offering a prayer: even a man spearing fish on the reef will invoke the divine blessing before he impales his breakfast shark. Today Araipu seemed to find sensuous pleasure in addressing his Creator. First he settled comfortably in the stem sheets, as might a man who is preparing to enjoy a glass of beer and a chat. He smiled in a gratified way that seemed to express: "Now, boys, we'll have a nice long delicious prayer!" He almost smacked his lips. While the boat rolled and pitched, the combers thundered, the sea birds screamed, Araipu raised his voice to the God of Abraham. He prayed and he prayed. He enjoyed himself so much that he seemed reluctant to stop praying; but finally, hearing William light his pipe and grunt impatiently, he ended with a hurried "Amen" lest the heathen spoil the prayer's magic by roaring a volley of curses. As it was, William contented himself with a mere, "Whas a matta? All time pray? No catch fish?" and started baiting his hook.

By speedy work I got my line over the side first. Like a flash a gar pike rose to grab my hook while it was still on the surface! With a single graceful jerk I swung the fish into the boat, then I let my eyes move slowly and interrogatively from one fisherman to the next, asking tacitly: "Well, gentlemen, what have you to say now?"

William replied with a sniffle; Araipu and First-Born were too astonished (or humiliated) to speak. Poaza pounced on my gar pike, crushed its skull between his teeth, and bit out a piece of flesh from its back, which same he fixed on his hook and dropped over the side, almost instantly to bring up a big cavalla. He glanced at us with a leer, rebaited his hook, and caught another fish. That's the way with Poaza. Though he uses the same tackle and bait as the rest of us use, he invariably catches twice as many fish.

Soon we were fishing with a vengeance. In a few hours we had fifty good-sized groupers, cavallas, barracudas, schnappers, but it is a fact that, after pulling up my one little gar pike, I never caught another fish! First-Born said it was because Desire was ill; Araipu said it might have something to do with my irregular church attendance; William affirmed that Miss Legs was to blame. He asked me if I had been poking up the floor boards in her house recently, and he ended his insulting speech by laughing so loudly that I scarcely heard Poaza telling me that I had caught no fish because I didn't

know how to catch fish. Thus was I repaid for bringing the animals on the expedition. I redoubled my efforts, but not so much as a minnow would take my hook!

By two o'clock we had as many fish as the boat would hold, and by then the wind was blowing half a gale. First we tried to sail back, but the sea was too choppy to make headway in a flat-bottomed boat. After a tack to the north and one back to The Rock we were a quarter of a mile farther away than when we had started. So we stowed the sailing gear, got out the oars, and started rowing. It was three o'clock by then. By four o'clock we were back alongside The Rock; by sundown we had gone perhaps one mile. Pulling lustily, the boat did not seem to move: it seemed anchored with a stem kedge.

And then, when the sun had set and we were no more than a half mile from Te Arai Reef, my unimaginative fishermen started talking about the canoes that had been lost with all hands when unexpectedly the current had changed. First-Born, who knows more about Te Arai Reef than most of the neighbors, said that often the current changes from south to north without warning. When this happens the tide rip smooths off on the south side of the reef and forms on the north side—where we were now!

I could bear only to glance at Te Arai in the gloomy evening light. It was a murderous sight: great, towering jet-black walls of water marching toward us inexorably. I knew these black walls of water, moving so deliberately, sometimes toppling over in thunderous and confused cataclysms, were unconcerned whether or not they engulfed us, broke our boat to kindling, killed us. We could not argue the point with them, supplicate them, offer them cash money. They would keep on moving, oblivious to our entreaties, oblivious that they were destroying us, oblivious to having left tragedy in their wake.

Now and again I glanced at the combers, and I heard their dull thunder, and I felt very small and pitiful, and I might have shown my terror in some unmanly way had not Poaza and William been there; but as it was I shouted an unfelt witticism and lay manfully to my oar.

I could have kissed that barrier reef. It represented shelter and, what was perhaps more acceptable, rest, for no work fatigues me more than rowing. We stepped the mast again, set sail, and skimmed along happily with a beam wind to make the boat passage at about nine o'clock.

Desire and her objectionable sisters and cousins said not one word when, during the fish division, I refused to take any because they were too gamy for my taste. I have mentioned what a gentle wife Desire is, how resigned she is to my eccentricities. Well, I have been mistaken. Like all women, she is a little shrew. Think of it: next morning, laid neatly by my coffee bowl was a handleless spoon with two little holes drilled through it! Desire, Mama, Pati, and Tili had found positions where they could watch me when I slumped down in my chair, filled my bowl, and picked up the spoon. They grinned like harpies, and Desire, the vixen, lisped sweetly:

“Perhaps you can hold your fingers under the holes, Ropati sweetheart! It is the only spoon we have!” Then Pati trilled something about “*Ropati te tautai!*” which I suppose means “Ropati the fisherman!” And Tili murmured: “There goes the poor little duck, Desire! How tired he looks! He didn’t sit down all night long!” And at the same time Mama pushed a tin of bully beef toward me in a meaningful way, her lips pressed tightly together.

The trading schooner is many months overdue. For nine months (save for Horatio’s spectacular return) we have had but one hint of contemporary life on this planet—smoke on the horizon, fugitive smoke too timid to reveal its source. I stared at it through my 22 pounds, 7X binocular, but not a sign of a smokestack, let alone a hull, could I see. At times it rose in a heavy black cloud, indubitable smoke; then again it dissolved in the horizon clouds. Presently I decided it was passing to westward. In a fit of disappointment I flung my binocular on the ground and broke one of the lenses. Now I have to use it as a monocular, and all because a damn-fool captain was not considerate enough to pass close to the reef so I could buy a few fresh provisions, and perhaps some medicine, for poor little Desire ... I know she will recover if only I can feed her milk, eggs, potatoes, bread—anything to keep up her strength ... but as it is ...

The rest of the world seems very unreal indeed. Sometimes I wish that Pure could repair his hopelessly broken wireless set so that I could sit in his station and, hearing him mutter: “Trenn is speaking: he sends his greetings!” re-establish objective relations with the now mythic world.

The last teaspoonful of sugar was used long ago. There is still enough tea for another month if I use it sparingly, boiling the leaves a long time. The soap is gone too, but there is a vine here that takes its place after a fashion. The idea is to bathe in the sea first, then rinse off in fresh water, rubbing one’s self with a great mass of vines. As for clothes, one wears as few as possible, for at best they are smelly.

I still have a little tobacco, and probably a few of the neighbors have tiny morsels hidden in the thatch or in the bottom of their chests. Poor old Deacon Bribery devotes his entire time to hunting and begging tobacco. A few nights ago he appeared on the back porch with a basket of taro and a fowl. After the presentation and a suitable speech he stood anchored in the exact center of the porch, grinning foolishly or perhaps imploringly, but anchored nevertheless. It took no great perspicacity to divine that Bribery would not leave the porch until I had given him some tobacco. I was reluctant to part with any, for I have cut myself down to three smokes a day to make my tiny hoard last another month or two; but I couldn’t have Bribery die on my porch, so I gave him a morsel of twist about as big as a bean. Immediately, with shaking fingers, he cut it up and packed it in his astonishingly black and greasy pipe, lit it, and sucked in a single deep breath; then, extinguishing the coal with his finger so

as not to waste any of the precious poison, he staggered to one of the porch posts to fall against it and cling to it for a long time. "I'm drunk! I'm drunk!" he groaned happily. "My head is twisted in a knot!"

It looked as though Deacon might die on my premises after all. I learned later that it was the first smoke he had had in ten days barring hernandia leaves, coconut roots, and husks. Being pure perique, it was as effective as poison gas. He will make the pipeful last a long time, taking a single breath of smoke a day.

Horatio is no better off than the rest of us. Even his social life is slackening, now that he has no tea or coffee to keep him awake through the moonlight watches. This morning I called on him, and, looking down his nose for the first time in weeks, he told me he had resolved never again to be unfaithful to Susanna.

"Oh yes," I commented, "this morning at coffee Desire told me that Kura has jilted you."

Hory scarcely heard my whole sentence. At the word "coffee" his brain became blocked. "Coffee, you said?" he asked, raising his eyes from his nose. "Now, Ropati, if you are drinking coffee I shall be very angry with you. It is not right for you to drink coffee when the resident agent has none. If you have any coffee, Ropati, you must share it with me."

I told him Desire had hidden a spoonful particularly for my birthday.

"Oh," Hory sighed, again looking down his nose. "So it is your birthday. I hope you many happy returns, I am sure."

"Let's talk about Kura," I suggested. "Tell me about the time her papa caught the two of you under the magnolia bush."

Hory being too humiliated to reply, I picked up a magazine and started turning the pages idly. Presently I came to a colored picture of a man in the act of biting into a sandwich. I turned the magazine so Hory could see the picture. A look of bathos came into his eyes.

"What is it, Ropati—bread?", he asked with a strange little snicker.

"A sandwich," I replied. "Ham!"

Then he laughed outright, ending on a high falsetto note; and instantly after he glanced at me to see if I had noticed the evidence of lessened self-control. I stared blankly at the thatching overhead, whistled a tune, and reflected that such things as ham sandwiches meant little to me, "Why," I muttered, "I'd rather read a page of Proust than eat any number of ham sandwiches."

Rising to leave, I said: "You'd better go back to Kura, Horatio. I know she loves you. She feels terribly bad because you have jilted her. Desire told me that last night Kura cried her eyes out. She may kill herself if you forsake her! An important person like you should not win a maiden's love and then cast her aside. She needs you, Horatio, needs you! Moreover, living alone on the last outpost of progress, with no other entertainment, you have a right to your social life."

So I flattered and lied; and Hory listened, believed, and decided that he might “forgive” Kura.

Here I am, trying to be cheerful when there is no cheer in my heart. I shall not open my journal again unless Desire’s health improves or I have something pleasant to narrate.

Now there shall be an exciting entry, a happy entry, an entry smelling of beer and onions and noisy with the whoops of the neighbors!

Horatio had been down with a bout of filariasis and was hopping around on half a leg, looking down his nose, unable to prosecute even his social life. I had read through my bookshelf to *The Manual of Dermatology* and was turning for very problematical relief to a second reading of *The Complete Works of Anthony Trollope* ... when suddenly ... out of the blue ... sail ho!

Like a flash I shaved, bathed, dressed in immaculate white drill, put on my shiny black manowar shoes, and got my new cork helmet out of the cordia-wood box. Then when Desire had tied my black four-in-hand tie I kissed her good-by, promised her a grand meal as soon as I returned ashore, and walked with dignified slowness to the reef boat, where Araipu was waiting for me with Pio, Deacon Tané, and Constable Benny.

We did not think of Honorable Horatio until we were in the shallows, halfway to the reef. Then it occurred to us that we should have waited for him, so we held back the boat with our oars shoved in the sand. Presently we saw Poaza and First-Born paddling Hory like mad across the bay, and when they were close we could see a suitcase in Hory’s lap while in his hands were papers, envelopes, stamps, and pound notes. He transshipped himself to my boat, snarling something about my expecting him to swim to the ship; but he was too excited to remember long that he was peeved. After a few quick perfunctory glances down his nose he heaved his inflamed leg on the gunwale and started shifting his papers, envelopes, stamps, and pound notes from one hand to the other as aimlessly as old Mama shifts eggs and biscuits and butter and things from one hand to the other.

“Is my necktie straight, Ropati?” he asked, screwing up his chin.

“No, Horatio,” I replied, and forthwith straightened the silly little black bow tie on the celluloid turndown collar, but only to notice it slip askew again.

“I wish you would call me Mr. Augustus today,” he said fretfully, “I don’t mind being called Horatio when we are alone, but now that we are going aboard a strange ship you must remember that I am the resident agent.”

“Okay, Mr. Augustus,” I said, and then told the boys to pole us to the reef. On crossing, Horatio got his trousers wet as well as his sheaf of papers,

envelopes, stamps, and pound notes, while the silly little bow tie worked from a forty-five-degree to a vertical position; then we forgot papers, ties, and malicious intents to leave ties askew, for the most beautiful vessel ever to visit Danger Island rounded the northern point! She clove the water at a good twenty-five knots; her brass glistened; a flag flew from her mast!

Lying in the swell close to the reef, Horatio and I squinted at the flag; then, when the vessel was close to us, Horatio asked: "What flag is that, Ropati? Is that the Japanese flag?"

I had recognized it by then. My heart was thumping; I could scarcely speak. "No, Mr. Augustus," I replied, tears starting from my eyes. "No, Hory, damn you! ... It's the good old Stars and Stripes!"

We had a devil of a time getting aboard her. Though we had fairly scudded across the lagoon and through the shallows—though we had made the reef shipshape and Bristol fashion and pulled out to sea handsomely—now my able-bodied oarsmen started staring. Rot them! There's something missing in the Danger Island brain.

The people are incapable of doing or thinking two things at once ... as is demonstrated by Mama, who when she sets the teakettle on the stove can do nothing else until the water has boiled. Asked what she is doing, she replies, "Boiling the water." Probably she would throw a fit if she had to set the table or make the coconut milk while the water was heating. But when the teakettle sings she moves it to the back of the stove, then methodically if aimlessly does her other duties, and, last of all, she brews the tea with the now cold water.

My husky oarsmen stared at the coast guard cutter *Telemachus*, and because they could not do two things at once they stopped rowing. I yelled a few sharp commands, but they could not hear me and observe the ship at the same time. Horatio yelled some commands, but was heard only by the men aboard the cutter. The wind drifted us closer. We could see the swank officers by the accommodation ladder, grinning and nudging one another, and all the sailors on the fo'c'sle deck, also grinning and nudging one another. Though I felt silly I yelled some more; but the damn-fool oarsmen continued to sit rigid and goggle-eyed, their oars held stiffly and unconsciously at varying angles, their heads twisted round on their shoulders, their eyes glued on *Telemachus*, their mouths open. We were abeam by now. A little farther and the remarkable oarsmen's heads would be twisted completely round, their necks would be broken, and we should drift with their dead bodies to Samoa— if *Telemachus* didn't bother to pick up such a boatload of lunatics.

Hory and I actually had to jump up and work shoulder to shoulder before we managed to rouse our noble oarsmen from their absorption in the ship and force them to row us to the accommodation ladder. The resident agent boarded her first, his tie making a complete revolution with each step he took up the ladder. I saw him unceremoniously turned over to one of the officers and led away.

Then, nonchalantly, my four-in-hand tie hanging exactly right, my cork helmet at just the proper daring angle, I climbed up the ladder.

But I felt like a silly fool nevertheless, and the feeling was intensified when I reached deck and the officers started clicking their heels and saluting me—saluting me, Ropati-tané of Puka-Puka! I took off my helmet, wondered if it were the proper thing to do, started saluting rapidly and nervously, grinned, turned red, and sputtered: “My name is Ropati.”

“Yes, yes, Mr. Ropati,” someone murmured. “Follow me, please. The commander is waiting for you in his quarters.” Then, as I followed him, with hundreds of eyes staring at me, he added: “You had quite a pull getting out to us, didn’t you? Ha, ha!”

When I was ushered into the commander’s sitting room I found a group of distinguished-looking gentlemen waiting for me. One stepped forward, with outstretched hand, smiling. I seemed to recognize him.

“It is a great pleasure to meet you again, Ropati!” he said. “You may remember me: I am the curator of the Museum, Mr. O’Neill.” And then, as though in a dream, I heard him murmur: “Let me introduce you to Captain Bier of the coast guard cutter *Telemachus* ... and Honorable George Prince, the congressman. Having read your *Contemplative Essays* and being greatly impressed by them, Mr. Prince arranged with the Coast Guard to have *Telemachus* call here—particularly to meet you!”

Dizzy, drunk as I had ever been on *mangaro* beer, I scarcely heard that excellent gentleman the curator when he continued: “And let me introduce you to Mr. James Powers, who is in charge of the Phoenix Islands Colony; and Mr. George Chudde, collector of customs; and Dr. Wolfe, senior medical officer of the Coast Guard.

“All right, if you’re through, let’s eat,” Captain Bier drawled like a true down-East Yankee, and motioned to the table that had been set in his sitting room. “We have delayed lunch so we could have the pleasure of your company,” he added.

Horatio had been relegated to the wardroom; I was dining with the commander and the distinguished passengers! Yet I scarcely touched the food. We get that way on the atolls. We dream of potatoes and beefsteaks, but when we are served these foods we cannot relish them: they are strong, salty, unpalatable.

Congressman George Prince seemed to know intuitively how I should be served. “Have a can of beer?” he suggested.

A steward, as distinguished in manners as the rest of the company, produced a can of beer—the first I had ever seen—and opened it with a little gadget that filled me with admiration. He gave me the gadget later, thus ascertaining that his memory would live on Danger Island with the memories of the heroes.

I drank the beer and fiddled with the food. I drank another can of beer, felt more at home, and invited them ashore; but the captain said that if they left

the ship it would “create an international crisis, for he had not received permission to land, though he and Congressman Prince had applied through the consul in Wellington, the British Ambassador, and the Court of St. James And all,” he added with charming blarney, “so we could see for ourselves the heavenly isle that has lured you from the land of your fathers.”

I was about to tell him that Danger Island had not lured me from my native land; that in fact I longed to return to my old position in the hair-oil business, and that I was more than half determined to throw myself at the feet of Penelope ... but then it occurred to me that a classical allusion would sound dippy; and anyway, James Powers had jumped to his feet in his energetic way and shouted: “Now, Ropati, we’ll show you some Yankee trading!”

The main deck had been roped off fore and aft so one half could be used by the Danger Islanders, who had come off by the score, and the other half by the officers, crew, and passengers. With true Yankee enterprise these last were carrying on trading such as would take the shine out of the wildest business rush ashore: mats, hats, pearl-shell hooks, shell wreaths, and sennit for old clothes and dollar bills. It reminded me of the Stock Exchange; but instead of a man yelling, “Five thousand Hair Oil!” he would whoop: “Hey, you! A busk fer yer straw hat!” or, “Gimme that grass carpet! A pair of pants fer yer grass carpet!”

There must have been a hundred buyers and a hundred sellers, all yelling for all they were worth. Never before had the Danger Islanders received such wealth for their goods. James Powers had a suitcaseful of his wife’s old clothes—clothes that would make history on Danger Island but were worthless to Powers. A crowd of natives surged about him, yelling their heads off; and he handed out the ancient laced satin, the velvet, the voile, to gather in an immense heap of native gear. The natives believed they were robbing the white men with a vengeance. Any villager would have given all he owned for one of Powers’ old dresses. But conversely the white men fancied they were doing some slick trading, so everyone was happy.

Of course I was in demand. “What’s this?” Poaza would whoop, waving a dollar bill over his head. “Is it money? Is it a pound?” Then Dr. Wolfe would grab my arm and shout in my ear: “Get me that shell wreath! Tell him I’ll give him a w’scoat for it.” Or old Mr. Scratch would wheeze: “Ropati! Ropati! Tell them I’ll trade my cane for a pipe!”

Presents were heaped on me. Congressman George Prince forced into my hands a box of Habana cigars and never asked for my vote; the curator gave me an ethnology; the collector of customs cried in my ear, above the racket: “I’ve just had a gross of canned beer put in your boat!” and the captain shouted in the other ear: “I’m sending ashore some fresh meat and butter and things!” Then the doctor gave me a bottle of bourbon, with a little sticker on it telling the sad tale of how Officer So-and-so had seized it from such-and-such a car, and later he gave me some morphine and heroin for Desire. Then Powers gave me a toy balloon and a voile dress for Johnny. Lord A’mighty!

Horatio threw a fit of jealousy when he saw all the presents!

Before long I managed to get aside with the chief steward and buy a boatload of provisions. Only superlatives express what they were like. The flour came in fifty-pound tins and would keep for years. And the onions! Each one was a perfect specimen fit for a county fair, while our trade onions come to us virtually in the form of onion soup. Two-pound tins of pineapples at seven cents a tin! Tobacco at forty cents a pound—and our trade tobacco is four dollars! I bought and bought until the boat was heaped high, but even then the steward urged me to take more. “No fancy goods?” he asked. “We have cases of pork and beans, clam chowder, tomato juice, peaches, pickles sweet or sour, most anything you can name.” So I bought some fancy goods too, hoping that Desire might eat them, but wondering, at the same time, how I could get everything ashore.

Presently the collector of customs led me to the wardroom, where I was introduced to a number of officers and to a newspaper reporter. Think of it! A newspaper reporter at Danger Island, and as true to type as they make them! I had scarcely shaken hands with him when he started asking questions, but I escaped him for the moment, for just then cans of beer were being opened, and I have never been able to give impressions to newspaper reporters while cans of beer are being opened.

The beer soon went to my head. I became very talkative. Again the reporter asked for my impressions of Danger Island, so, purposely misunderstanding him, I gave him my impressions of the men aboard *Telemachus*.

“I am impressed,” I said, half fuddled by now, “by the wellgroomed—one might almost say immaculate—appearance of these my countrymen. There are no bow ties askew; the clothes fit well; the shoes are polished, the hair recently cut. The faces of these my countrymen,” I continued, a tear glistening in my eye, for I was rapidly becoming more fuddled, “are clean-shaven and healthy. They are full of energy. They are enterprising. This is particularly noticeable to me, for the white men in this part of the world are a lackadaisical set of loafers, myself excepted. All in all, gentlemen, I am so favorably impressed that I drink to your health!”

I turned to glance at Mr. Chudde’s boyish fifty-year-old face. I could see that he was having the time of his life, was recapturing his youth. He had let his beard grow, his hair too. He was dressed in work pants and a black smoking jacket. Now and again he would let a “damn” escape his lips in a way that suggested it was not customary. He drank his beer with gusto, even bravado; he gestured in a devil-may-care manner. In fact, he was extremely likable.

More cans of beer were opened; then a message came from the captain that he was sailing immediately, so I upended my can and hurried to the main deck. The natives had been herded into their canoes; Horatio was on his way ashore; apparently I was the only one left aboard. I shook hands with the

distinguished gentlemen gathered by the ladder and climbed into my boat.

“Will you make it?” Captain Bier called. Glancing down, I noticed that the gunwale was within two inches of the water. The boat was heaped four feet high with provisions, and on top of the provisions squatted a flock of natives. But I was full of Yankee beer and knew the passengers could be jettisoned if need be, so, “Sure!” I yelled back. “Just watch us... . Give way, boys!” and we moved toward the reef.

Telemachus turned on her heel as niftily as a soldier doing the about-face. Away she marched at double time; but when she was a mile or so off we saw her suddenly do a rightabout-march and steam back to us.

There on deck was Araipu! The vicar’s eyes were like saucers! We could see he was badly scared. Well, he was got aboard, and *Telemachus* speeded over the horizon.

At first Araipu was too scared to talk, but by the time we had crossed the reef he managed to tell us that he had been wandering about the ship in a kind of daze and had got into a room where there was a row of white basins. Then he had noticed at least a dozen doors and had wondered vaguely by which one he had entered. Perplexed, he had chosen a door at random, opened it, and found himself in a tiny room empty save for a roll of paper and a sort of basin with water in it and a pump handle at one side. The door had locked itself behind him while he was leaning over to examine the strange basin, and at the same time he had heard the engines churning as the ship got under way! For a little time Araipu had tried to open the door, then he had noticed a space beneath it big enough to crawl through. He lay flat on the floor, and he was worming his way out when someone came in, discovered him, and hurried him on deck.

By the time we had reached Yato Point, Araipu was full of courage again: he was bragging about his adventure; he was telling us that for tuppence he would have gone with *Telemachus* to the Island of the White Men. “I always did want to see Falisico [Frisco],” he declared. In a day or two he will claim he had tried to stow away.

Desire was quite cheerful when I got home. We had a grand meal of beef and onions, boiled potatoes with butter oozing all over them, and three tins of pineapples. After the meal Desire downed a can of beer and then gave me permission to make a night of it, so, “Sit you down, William,” I ordered the heathen retainer, and continued, when he had placed his hoary person on the triclinium’s south couch: “Here I have a gross of canned beer... . Sit still, damn you! Don’t grab! ... And here”—displaying a nickel-plated gadget—“I have a ... thing. We shall call it a can opener. I fix the opener on the can, thus, pull upward, and pierce an equilateral triangle in the can. Like a cumulus cloud the beer foam rises above the tin horizon. I fix the opener on the other side and pierce another hole, this being done so a vacuum will not be formed when you suck beer out of the first hole... . Physics, you see, William! Here, you low fellow, drink heartily to the President of the United States, God bless

him!”

EPILOGUE

FOR A LONG TIME I have been too gloomy to write. Of course I am referring to Desire's illness. She is slipping away from me; there is no hope for her recovery.

For months I have been trying to work up enough fortitude to write this, and thereby, perhaps, lessen my pain by establishing it as a thing that cannot be avoided, a thing inexorable, destined; but always I have managed, some way or other, to postpone the unpleasant task. Even now I am not at all certain that I shall finish it. I suppose we are all that way. When we have an unpleasant task to do we unconsciously postpone it by finding other things to attend to first. Before opening my journal I found it necessary to mend my fish net; then I moved toward my writing table, but only to note some scraps of pandanus leaf on the floor where I had been making cigarette papers. So I cleaned them up, and while doing so I remembered, by a natural association of ideas, that the rubbish pile by the cookhouse needed burning. And finally, when everything had been attended to, I felt nauseated, too ill to write. I was about to give it up when Desire started coughing and thus drove me to writing to him the reality in the narration thereof.

I have told you little of Desire's illness. If the details have been scant it is not because of callousness on my part but rather cowardice. I have been afraid to admit that the diagnosis is all too evident: tuberculosis—the same affliction that killed Tangi. I try to delude myself into believing it is something else. I study my Hughes's *Practice of Medicine*, compare Desire's symptoms with the ones described under scores of afflictions, and try to make myself believe she has some other complaint. For days I try to convince myself that she has chronic bronchitis. I distort the recognized bronchitis symptoms so they tally with those of Desire, but always in the end it comes back to the scourge of the South Seas: tuberculosis.

True to type, I am spending my time trying to escape. Sometimes I wonder if I am spending my life trying to escape from something—myself perhaps. Half my dreams are of running away from an unseen pursuer, leaping down ridges, dashing through forests, swimming across rivers, with the sure knowledge that some person or intangible danger is pursuing me. Never have I seen this pursuer or known what the danger is; but he, or it, is none the less terrifying.

But this is no dream in the little house at Yato Point. God knows I wish it were one. I am trying to escape from awareness of impending tragedy, and I am succeeding at times by telling the fribbling details of a trader's life.

Meekly carrying the lamp, William, like a hoary wise virgin, lighted us into the house, set the lamp on the floor, and departed without a word. Desire,

drowsy with morphine, dozed in my arms and did not waken when I laid her gently on the sleeping mat. William having left, I blew out the lamp, then sat close to my wife. The fires burning here and there in the village cast fitful lights and shadows through the house, moved caressingly in Desire's auburn hair and across the delicate sculpture of her face.

Presently I changed to my pajamas, lay beside my wife, and lifted her feverish head to rest it gently on my arm. I did not wish to sleep: I wished only to be alone with her and my thoughts. My arm pressed about her, and a poignant longing came over me to tread with her the cavern path to the Pagan Underworld, to sit with her under the great hernandia tree of Tangi and listen to the gong music of Tulikalo, the laughter and songs of the gods. Much better such a hereafter than the harping and adoration of the Christian Heaven! And by and by we could descend, hand in hand, to the third level of the Underworld, where the ancients gossiped in Leva's House of a Thousand Posts; where taro grew to maturity overnight and fish leaped from the sea to fill one's canoe; where the souls of dead children played on the grassy knolls; where there were places of love more inviting than the places of the upper world; and where the strange Goddess Leva plaited in her mat figures symbolic of the earthly life of each spirit. You see, I know all about the nether world. In a few days Desire will grope down the cavern path. She will be alone in the awful blackness! Oh, if only I could walk before her so she could place her little foot in my footprint, feel some small comfort in the presence of her man! Then together we could wash away our earthly longings, our evil inclinations, even our memory of the upper world, in the pools of fresh water. We could listen to Tulikalo's gong; we could sit on Hokamani's stone; we could watch Leva incorporate in her mat the design of our lives, and, closely embraced as of old, we could sleep in a leaf-bowered place of love by the pagan sea!

I dreamed that I had wakened in a strange house and, on going to the breakfast room, had found Desire seated at the table. She smiled and sipped her tea but did not speak; and she was dressed in the blue flowered voile that became her so well. Her long hair was done up in European fashion, with a wavy lock patted down on each temple, a tortoise-shell comb, and a gardenia behind her ear. She was as I loved to see her.

I have said that she did not speak, but someone—myself to myself, perhaps —spoke for her.

"She wanted to be with you," the voice said softly, apologetically. "She could not bear to be away from you."

"It is cruel!" I exclaimed, staring at the gentle, fawn-eyed girl. "Now the pain, the dreadful anticipation must be repeated!"

"Oh no," the voice replied. "She is quite well again. She needed only a

long rest.”

“I am glad you have returned, Desire,” I said. “I thought you were—were gone!”

Then the voice said in the same soft, apologetic way: “No, she did not die. It was a dreadful mistake. You are taking her to Hawaii now, as you often promised.”

The scene changed and I dreamed that I was lying alone in the mosquito net when suddenly an edge of it was lifted and Desire crept in. She smiled, leaned over to kiss me, and made love in her intimate, deeply serious way. The dream was more vivid than a waking experience could be. When I woke I found myself weeping, and I remembered that Desire was dead.

She died on the fourteenth of January, more than six months ago; and all this time I have been wandering about like a man in a dream, only vaguely aware that something has gone amiss. When asked: “Where are you going, Ropati?” I have replied: “I am searching for my wife. She must be at her mother’s house. I believe she has been ill and is taking some kind of a witch-doctor cure.”

But now I remember how, the night before her death, we knew the end was near and we talked about it. She asked me to be close to her when she died and to hold her in my arms a little while afterward. At seven in the morning her sister Pati came. Then I sat on the floor, with my back braced against a wall post, and I held Desire in my arms; and then, in a little time, her heart fluttered—I could feel it under my hand—there was a convulsion, her breathing stopped, and she relaxed in my arms. Later she breathed once again, a little sign from the place of death, and that was the end.

I told Pati to be quiet so as not to attract the neighbors; then I sat with Desire for a half hour, as she had asked me to; and by and by I closed her eyes and her lips, and I bathed her, and dressed her, and kissed her good-by. Pati sent for the relatives. They took Desire away, and I did not see her again.

PART II

(Several Years Later)

THE HURRICANE

Chapter I

THE TRADING KETCH *Hurry Home* lumbered up to the boat passage at noon, and an hour later Captain Prospect came ashore, viewing life on the sunny side as he puffed prodigiously at the great calabash pipe that hung down to his Adam's apple. On entering my house he squeezed his toothbrush and clean singlet in the bookcase between the works of Nat Gould and the shelf above them, then made himself at home, muttering at the time, even before a word of greeting or the latest news of World War II, that he liked my taste in books, and adding that he had just read a not-too-trashy yarn by Nat Gould entitled *Madame Bovary*—Bovary being from the Latin *bovus*, a cow.

Probably Captain Prospect had taken for granted that I was at home, for he is very nearsighted and my house is dark to one coming in from the noonday glare. "I am glad to see you back at Puka-Puka," I said. "Sit down and tell me the news. Is there still a war going on?"

"I suppose that is you, Ropati," the captain replied in a matter-of-fact tone, his head cocked toward me and his eyebrows crinkled. "I saw somebody and thought it might be you . . . I've nearly gone blind since sailing among these atolls." He grinned faintly and a merry twinkle came into his green farset eyes. "The people in Rarotonga claim it's due to alcohol," he went on, chuckling dryly. "They say my eyes are bloodshot and bleary because I'm a secret drinker—and I never touched a drop of alcohol in my born days."

Captain Prospect folded his wiry self on a mat in a corner of the room and started repeating all the gossip from the Cook Islands. So important to him was the local South Sea scandal that I could scarcely turn his mind from it long enough to learn that my country had entered the war.

"Yes, yes, Ropati; we're allies now," he told me. "America fell into the war just before my radio battery ran down. That was about two weeks ago. The Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, sank half the Pacific fleet, and they may be sinking my ship from under me if I don't keep a sharp lookout. . . . But on the other hand *Hurry Home* is a lucky ship, if I do say so myself. I'd just as soon take my chances on her as ashore."

"Perhaps the children and I will take our chances on her, now that the U.S.A. is in the war," I said after he had satisfied my many questions. "I'd like to get close to civilization, in case I'm needed." Then, with a good deal of sincerity, I added that I should prefer sailing on *Hurry Home* to any luxury vessel that ever tossed her proud head above the billows.

"Perhaps, perhaps," Captain Prospect assented cautiously. "Of course that's the way I feel about my ship; but to some passengers—the finical kind—she may have her drawbacks—a little slow, perhaps, and not what you'd call luxurious. But I'll tell you one thing, Ropati: she has the big Rarotonga

traders on their toes. She's making history in these islands! Now take that fellow Tenneb, the Line Islands' manager. I've got him eating out of my hands, I have. He tried to stop me carrying passengers—said my ship wasn't seaworthy. My ship not seaworthy! She's the huskiest little packet in this ocean, and she can outsail Tenneb's worm-eaten old schooner, fair wind or foul. And as for safety and comfort ..." And so on until finally I managed to turn him back to the subject of our departure from Puka-Puka. He agreed to take us, but mentioned that we would have to stop on uninhabited Suvarrow Atoll a month or two while he refitted.

Late in the afternoon he left me, to take tea with the resident agent. While moving out the doorway he told me to be ready to go aboard at noon the next day, which meant, however, in two or three days.

"*Hurry Home* will call at Suvarrow!" I exclaimed to myself as I left the house to look for the cowboys and tell them the exciting news. I pictured my four children—the cowboys—chasing fish in the reef shallows, hunting wide-awake eggs on the sand cays, exploring the jungle. There was Son Jakey coming into camp with a giant coconut crab, his chest thrust out, his eyes agleam; and six-year-old Elaine hunting periwinkles on the fringing reef; and little Nga-the-youngest playing in the clean white sand of Anchorage Island, digging up, mayhap, the gold of an old Spanish adventurer; and Daughter Johnny being a ten-year-old mother to the other children, full of the joy of responsibility now that there were no servants to take the spice out of doing things in her own way; and the old man himself, in glowing health, thankful to be at last on an island where he can invite his soul without disturbance from those pests of the South Sea—mosquitoes, flies, and roosters. It would be a fitting way to bid farewell to the island life.

"Bundle up your dresses," I said to Johnny when I found her with the rest of the cowboys. "We're sailing on *Hurry Home*. We'll go to Suvarrow first, then to America, where we'll ask our uncle for a job."

"What uncle?" Johnny wanted to know.

"Uncle Sam," I replied.

Probably the artist in Captain Prospect brought him to the South Seas, but, once arrived, the man in him had to subjugate the artist to survive. Now the artist defends his fall by pretending not to see, save at unguarded moments, the beautiful in island life. Captain Prospect has a genuine appreciation for good books, but he disguises it by claiming, with waggish humor, that he never heard of any author except Nat Gould. "Oh, that book!" he'll mutter. "I've read that book. It was by Nat Gould or one of those author fellows." Likewise he excuses the accidental use of a rare or poetic word by giving it an imaginary Latin root and thus passing it off as an idle conceit.

Two unhappy contradictions of character have been the curse of his life: that is, an artistic temperament in conflict with the necessity to live on next to

nothing, and a capacity for friendship in conflict with an overpowering mania for gossip. But whatever failings he may or may not have, his virtues outbalance them. Bloodshot and bleary though his eyes may be, an occasional twinkle in them tells of a rich sense of humor and a kindly temper. Short and bony though his body may be, in it lies the heart of both an artist and a doughty seaman.

Mayhap the artist in him transfigures decrepit old *Hurry Home* into a white-winged clipper ship, but, whatever his vision, he is without doubt a courageous man and a stubborn one. He is putting up a gallant fight to make his little sea louse pay, and, incomprehensible to all the traders in these islands, he is keeping her afloat. There was little dissimulation in me when I told him I should prefer sailing in *Hurry Home* to any luxury vessel that ever tossed her proud head above the billows.

Formerly Captain Prospect was master of a schooner in the island trade. On his first departure from Rarotonga, Tenneb, his firm's manager, told him to hurry round the Lower Group and hurry home. And on subsequent voyages the instructions were always the same: "Hurry home, hurry home," until Captain Prospect became rebellious. "All right, I'll hurry home," he grimly assured the manager, and from then on he made such quick passages that Tenneb could not find enough work to keep his schooner at sea. She lay in port half the time, exasperating Tenneb and gratifying Prospect. Before long Tenneb suggested that, due to depressed business conditions, the schooner might make more leisurely passages; but Prospect shook his head stubbornly, growled that he must hurry home, and proceeded to break all former records. The outcome was that they parted with mutual ill esteem. Then Prospect bought his little ketch and, perhaps in both drollery and resentment, christened her *Hurry Home*. But not even he, optimist that he is, would hint that his vessel is able to get home in a hurry.

In this vessel we sailed today—Daughters Johnny, Elaine, and Nga; Son Jakey; the old man; and, among the household goods, four camphorwood chests, a roll of mats, a case of books, and a Puka-Puka sailing canoe—which last pretty well occupies the entire deck, but promises a grain of safety should *Hurry Home* meet with misadventure, the canoe being more seaworthy than the ship.

Hurry Home is of about twentyfive tons. She has no engine, she will not sail better than an average raft, and her topsides are from five to eight feet out of the water, giving her the appearance of a floating packing case. Her gear is rotten, her sails have to be patched after every puff of wind, her rope is gray and threadbare, and there is no spare rope or canvas aboard her. She has five rusty oil drums for water, insufficient provisions to carry her back to her home port, no passenger accommodations whatsoever—yet often she carries from ten to twenty—and she exudes a feter that distinguishes her from all Portuguese sponge fishers, Chinese junks, and garbage scows—a peculiar stench that is best left undescribed. Furthermore, she leaks on topsides and

bottomsides; there is no w.c. or even a basin for washing one's hands, and not even a galley. But there is a rusty tin trunk seized to the taffrail aft, with three iron bars driven through it for a grate, and in this strange contraption Oli-Oli, the Puka-Pukan cook, boils water and cooks a mess called stew—a mess as nauseous as the stench of *Hurry Home* herself.

When it blows and rains the tin trunk is closed, a draft of air is sucked in it through a number of holes below the grating, and the smoke oozes out through a number of holes in its top. Captain Prospect is very proud of his “ship's galley,” and solely because it was begotten by his ingenuity in salvaging junk. And as for the food dished out from the galley—well, perhaps his roseate spirit infuses a fragrance to even Oli-Oli's mephitic stew and insipid tea.

The galley is on the starboard quarter aft of the tiller; the substitute for a w.c. is on the port quarter. About two feet forward from the transom an old spar has been fixed athwartship, from railtop to railtop, and from this spar hangs a piece of ragged canvas. It is there as a symbol of modesty, but because it blows in one's face when the wind is forward and blows away from one when the wind is aft, one relies on the delicacy of the sailors and passengers more than on the canvas for privacy. Only First Mate Tagi ignores, in this respect, the amenities of good breeding.

The captain's cabin is forward of the galley, the w.c., and the tiller. About six feet fore and aft by the width of the vessel there is a berth on either side, and between them a tiny table that is used for meals, cards, and a jumble of odds and ends. The starboard berth is for the captain, his magazines, his spectacles, clothes, oilskins, radio, and so on; the port berth and the rest of the cabin present a scrambled heap of everything that should not be in a captain's cabin.

Said the captain when we were drawing away from the land, headed for The Rock at the end of Te Arai Reef: “Now, Ropati, the chronometer is out of order, the radio battery is run down, I've got only a 1930 *Nautical Almanac*, my *Epitome* is a hundred years old, my eyesight is failing, and I don't know what day of the month it is—but my sailors will know that.” He cleared his throat, a waggish flicker came into his farset eyes, and he asked: “Ropati, would you mind taking my ship to Suvarrow?”

“Not at all,” I replied, “so long as you mean it.”

“Of course I mean it,” he spat at me. “You take charge; then I'll have plenty of time to play cribbage with you.” He blinked a few times in rapid succession, thoughtfully, then amended: “I don't mean that you are to interfere with my sailors. My mate Tagi is a thoroughly capable man; and when he's below, my second mate Takataka takes charge; and when they're both below, my cook Oli-Oli sails my ship. What I want you to do is to navigate—and be on hand for a game of cribbage... . You don't play chess?”

I replied that I played a very poor game.

“Then it's no use playing with me,” Captain Prospect informed me, and

added that he played the best chess in the Cook Islands, often taking on two or even three players at once, and invariably beating them.

Just then my attention was turned to the children. We were beyond the lee of the west reef; *Hurry Home* was lurching and plunging, the children in the throes of seasickness. Poor cowboys! I had my hands full for the rest of the evening carrying buckets for them and trying to make them comfortable. When we had missed by inches The Rock's fringing reef and had plunged and rolled through the tide rip that builds up beyond Te Arai Reef the sun had set, the night had turned squally, and I had to get the children—or the cowboys, as they prefer to be called—below. Johnny and Jakey managed to lower themselves into the hold, but I had to carry Elaine, while Oli-Oli carried Nga.

Below was a mass of cargo stowed in any old way. Heaps of rusty chain and rocks for ballast; trunks, chests, and bundles; bags of flour and cases of beef; several hundred baskets of dried fish that smelled to high heaven; the five water drums; and no ventilation whatsoever. But there was a smoky little lamp by the light of which I managed to stow the cowboys here and there and furnish receptacles of sorts for seasickness. Poor dears! They were too ill to know or care whether they lay on chain or rocks or the corners of packing cases.

Now they are asleep; it is raining hard; the air is so thick that they must be close to suffocation; and I myself am so close to that state that I must close my journal.

“You’ve been to Suvarrow before, of course, Ropati,” Captain Prospect said after his spirit had been mellowed by winning three games of cribbage, “but you’ve never seen the island in a really pristine state.” He paused, and his brow clouded in thought as though, mayhap, he were fishing for a Latin root for pristine. Apparently not hooking one, he continued: “Suvarrow is grown up solid in jungle, right down to the water’s edge. The only place where you can walk without cutting a path through the bush is in the clearing where the old trading post used to be. That’s the way Suvarrow is now: it is a bird and crab and turtle sanctuary.”

Captain Prospect tapped the cards into their box and shoved them, and the cribbage board, to the back of the table. Then, after a glance at the clock, he continued: “H.M.S. *Leith* stopped at Suvarrow for a few hours back in 1938, and the yacht *Lorna D.* was there for two days in 1939, and I called in for a short visit last year; otherwise no one has been on Suvarrow since you were there in 1934. As I have said, Anchorage Island is a solid block of jungle But, Ropati—but before the year is out I will clear away the jungle, build houses, and establish the most unique tourist resort in the world! Instead of a sanctuary for birds, crabs, and turtles it will be a sanctuary for sun-hungry white men from New Zealand, London, New York!”

He scowled slightly, as though in anticipation of some facetious remark;

then, deciding that I was interested, he fumbled among the odds and ends at the back of the table until he had unearthed a scrap of paper. This he laid where we both could see it and started to comment on the items jotted thereon.

“*The Spa*: That will be established on the north point of Anchorage Island, by that sun-heated swimming pool. A grand place for lungers and rheumatics — with a refreshment house and beach umbrellas by the fresh-water pools! That’s the first attraction. Second: *Big Game Fishing*: I have no doubt, Ropati, but that motorboats will be going out for swordfish every day. The time will come when no sportsman will consider himself worthy of the name unless he has fished at Prospect’s South Sea Tourist and Health Resort! Now, *Jungle Expeditions*: Very thrilling—at five shillings and sixpence a head, including transportation by *Hurry Home* to Seven Islands and back, and with a jungle feast of sea birds and coconuts thrown in. And finally, *Games*: Tennis, ping-pong, golf—”

“Wait a minute, Captain,” I interrupted. “How can you play golf on an atoll where the biggest islet is not a mile long?”

The captain eyed me sourly, muttered something about my lack of imagination, then glanced at the dock, and, “You’d better go on deck and take the sun,” he said. “It’s ten minutes to twelve. We might make Nassau this evening if you paid more attention to navigating and less attention to cribbage and wild schemes to establish a tourist resort on Suvarrow!”

I took the sextant on deck but did not bother to keep the sun on the horizon, for I knew the latitude within a mile or two, having sighted the breakers on Tema Reef at sunrise. Oli-Oli, the Puka-Pukan cook, sailor, and general roustabout, was at work by the tin-trunk stove. He was naked to the waist, but his fat buttocks were covered partially by a ragged pair of cotton shorts, stiff with grease and grime and with a number of large rents and holes. The sweat poured from him on deck and often enough in the food he was preparing. Today he worked like a Trojan grating coconuts, squeezing the oil from the meat, then wiping his hands on his sweaty skin and in his hair. Presently the coconut oil was poured in the stew, the mess was stirred vigorously with a piece of firewood, and the pot was removed from the stove to be placed on deck where it would be handy to stumble against. Then Oli-Oli took the teakettle, which had been made from the half of a kerosene tin, filled it with water, and placed it in the stove. He added a half teaspoonful of tea leaves while the water was still cold, so he would not forget them, perhaps, for when the water had boiled it would be impossible to tell by sight, smell, or taste whether the tea had been added. In getting the tin on the fire he covered his hands with soot. This he wiped off on his skin but not in his hair. And finally, his labors for the moment accomplished, he rolled to the hatchway, where the cowboys were lying, and, being a Puka-Pukan and therefore feeling paternal relationship toward them, he picked up little Nga and fondled the rest of the soot, grime, sweat, and grease onto her unresisting

person. This delighted Nga and amused the other cowboys; the two mates and the captain, who were on deck, did not seem to notice anything unusual about Nga's soot-smearred face; and as for me—well, when traveling on *Hurry Home* one must not be fastidious.

Takataka was at the pump, which is the only thing in good working order aboard Captain Prospect's "ship." He is 'a handsome half-caste from Palmerston Island, about forty, and strong as a bull. He speaks the curious provincial English that was brought to Palmerston originally by William Marsters, a trading skipper who settled on the island with his three wives and forthwith increased and multiplied with a vengeance. "Yas," Takataka, will say, "I smokes cigarettes; also I chaws tobaccer." Or: "I tromped to my lond and I clombed a tree." Though a little too obsequious for my taste, he has the manners of a gentleman. He alone of the crew eats his food with a knife and fork, removes his spoon from his cup of tea, and eschews conversation when his mouth is full. I believe Tagi and Oli-Oli resent this: they feel that he is putting on airs. Today, as I watched him at the pump, each to and fro motion seemed a gesture of protest against such ignoble labor for a descendant of Captain William Marsters.

Querulous old Tagi, *Hurry Home's* mate, was asleep forward in the shade of the jib. An indifferent sailor, a mighty eater, finical and likable as an old woman, Captain Prospect calls him "my first officer," or "my mate Tagi," perhaps humoring himself with the idea that his ship carries a mate, as well as a second mate and a cook—common sailors being superfluous. But Tagi has none of the qualities of an officer. If he tells Takataka and Oli-Oli to take in sail they tell him to do it himself, and he does it, in a mood at once resigned, peevish, and vindictive. If a black squall looms over the horizon and he calls the captain, as invariably he does, the captain reminds him that, being mate, he should do as he thinks best; but because he does not think, save only about food, fat women, and grievances, he then consults the second mate, who, as a matter of Palmerston politeness, takes the cook into consultation. The result is that they are consulting noisily when the squall strikes the vessel, when, often enough, one of the passengers may take in sail or the halyards may part and the sail come down of its own accord.

But when there are fish to be caught, Tagi is the man of the moment. There is something savage about the way he brings in the bonito and the albacore. His orders are snarled too fiercely to be disobeyed. Of the sport of fishing he knows nought; to him each bonito he swings over the side is food, and food is second to nothing, not even to fat women and grievances.

This is the mate to whom Captain Prospect gives complete charge of his ship. It seems all wrong, but the fact remains that, sooner or later, by guess or by God, without benefit of navigation or seamanship, *Hurry Home* often reaches her ports of call—sometimes she misses them.

There is a light wind tonight and the sky is clear. The cowboys are asleep, all in a row on the main hatch. Tagi is sleeping on deck forward; Oli-Oli is

stewing in his Black Hole of a forecastle; Takataka is at the tiller. If the wind holds we will be off the reef of Nassau early tomorrow morning—not bad sailing for *Hurry Home*: fifty miles in forty hours!

We sighted Nassau dead ahead at daylight and were close aboard by 8 A.M. The seas were heavy on the reef, as they often are at Nassau—or Motu Ngaungau (Lonely Island), as the Puka-Pukans call this round, lagoonless, hillock of sand. We had little hope of landing our ton of cargo for the two white men and three natives who are at present the sole inhabitants of Lonely Island, and for some time we doubted if anyone would come out to us. Tagi, at the helm, brought the vessel close to the reef. We could see, over the high barrier of breakers and the stretch of shallows, the glaring white beach, a copra shed set back in the outstretched shadows of coconut trees, a hedge-bordered path leading to the houses on the windward side of the island, and under a clump of pandanus trees above the beach an outrigger canoe with a few coconut fronds laid over it. Save for these there was no sign of human life.

“I guess they haven’t sighted us,” Captain Prospect muttered, “and that’s strange, because the arrival of my ship is a big occurrence in their lives.”

“Thar they coam!” Takataka shouted.

“Do you see them, Ropati?” Prospect asked. “Are they all there—all five?”

“No, Captain; just two natives. They’re carrying the canoe down to the shallows now.”

“I’m worried,” came from Prospect as he squinted toward the beach, his eyebrows knitted and his head thrust forward a little. “I hope nothing has happened to Ellenden and Clarke. They were such pleasant men!”

The two natives pulled the canoe through the shallows and then held it in the rush of water on the reef. It was a long time before they attempted to shoot through the breakers, but at last a lull came; they rushed forward, swung themselves into the canoe, grasped the paddles and dug them into the water. It looked to us, at sea, as though they would never make it; but they knew what they were about. After seesawing over the crest, of a curling breaker they reached the calm water in the lee of the reef, then paddled leisurely to us.

Of course there was plenty of shouting and laughing and tobacco cadging when they had boarded us, but Takataka managed to get the letter that one of them had in his hat. He brought it to the captain.

“Read it to me,” the captain said. “I haven’t got my spectacles.” So I opened the letter and read:

“DEAR CAPTAIN WHOEVER-TO-HELL-YOU-ARE:

“We’ve been waiting for your damned sea louse since the middle of December. Where’s our case of Christmas beer and our mail? Send them ashore p.d.q. and to hell with the rest of the cargo. And tell the bloody Administration to next time send our gear by a sure ship—not by Noah’s Ark or a raft or *Hurry Home*.

The captain didn't comment on the letter, but I could tell, by his expression of disappointment when the canoe had managed to recross the reef in returning to the island with the mail and beer, that he was deeply hurt. Also, I knew by the way he made his eyes snap that the letter would rankle in his soul for many a day to come.

I felt genuinely sorry for Captain Prospect. I knew that such rebuffs pain him more than he is willing to admit. "To the devil with them," I said, swinging my arm toward the beach. "We'll treat them with silent contempt ... Let's get under way for Suvarrow."

"Yes," the captain replied, "I think we can ignore them." Then he shouted to his mate, so lightheartedly that I could not believe it affected, "Set the stays'l, Tagi! We'll show Ropati what the old lady can do when all her kites are flying!" And then, with a sudden, momentary change to asperity, "Noah's Ark! A raft! I hope those fellows ashore see us, for really, Ropati, *Hurry Home* puts on quite a burst of speed with her stays'l set!"

The sea is calm; not a ripple wrinkles her pinguid scalp. The sea louse crawls on the bald pate of the sea in a blue funk, searching in vain for a tuft of spray in which to hide her odious self as betimes she sucks the lifeblood from the ocean. But suck she does, as greedily now as when the sea wears a tousled head of hair. Each watch the sailors work a half hour at the pump. Shush shush, shush shush, the intermingle sound wakens me when I am sleeping below, and it seems that I wait for hours for the gurgling sound that apprises me the pump has sucked.

The cowboys are well and have taken complete charge of the vessel, much to the annoyance of Tagi and the relief of Captain Prospect. I believe the captain would not hesitate to turn the vessel over to Jakey, and I believe that Jakey would be quite as trustworthy a first officer as Tagi.

The children fancy they have embarked on an odyssey; they are "sailing swiftly over the broad back of the wine-dark unharvested sea" to fabulous lands beyond the edge of the world. To them the sea pest is a thing of magic; it is even beautiful, as are all things strange and incomprehensible. Johnny has been to Fiji, so she is able to tell the others of the wonders they will see in Rarotonga's cinema, of the beatitude of the ice-cream parlor, the ecstasy of the motorcar, the ravishment of chewing gum.

Fat little six-year-old Elaine squeals with delight when the sea louse rolls her hairy side in an oily swell. She pays much attention to her food, so as to make up for time lost during seasickness. What with the stew she plasters over her face while eating with her hands and the grime Oli-Oli plasters over her while fondling her, she is in a paradise of childish nastiness— God bless her!

So is Nga, but somehow the youngest daughter does not seem so filthy. Perhaps it is because, being only half the size, there is not so much child to be

soiled. Four-year-old Nga insists on climbing to the crosstrees several times a day to look for the land. This terrifies the captain, and his temper is not improved when I explain that the only danger lies in the rigging parting from the strain of her weight.

“Lond ho!” Takataka sang out from the crosstrees. I climbed the tilted ratlines to where the Palmerston Islander was on lookout, and soon I made out a few dots seemingly suspended a little above the horizon. They were, of course, the tallest of the coconut trees on Anchorage Island—Suarrow’s largest reef islet—raised above the horizon before the rest of the trees were visible.

“Thar she lays,” said Takataka, grinning at me. “Yo’re a good cap’n. The sailors ne’er changed yor course at all, at all, and you rose the lond o’er the bo’sprit!”

Then Takataka climbed cautiously down the rigging, testing each ratline with his bare foot before risking his weight on it. I stayed aloft until the sun had set and the misty, undulating line of treetops had risen above the sea marge and then faded in the darkening clouds.

It is midnight now, but I have no wish to sleep, with lonely, haunted Suarrow so close aboard. At eight o’clock I took the tiller for the first half of the watch; then Tagi relieved me, I went below, and, returning with my binocular, picked the island out of the darkness, stared at it, and recalled little idylls from the three months I had spent there on a former visit, when Desire was alive and Johnny and Jakey were babies. As I stared at the crumb of land, scarcely more than visible, I felt a pang of mingled sadness for the loss of Desire and happiness for my return to the island that somehow must shelter her spirit.

Presently the sea fell calm. Then I heard resounding across the quiet water the thunder of breakers, far away on Suarrow’s barrier reef. The sound came low and mournful, rising and subsiding, calling with a dreadful and yet fascinating insistence. Emotion welled up in me, I thought I could perceive the voice of Desire in that faraway lonely call.

At 4 A.M. we were a half mile off Anchorage Island, with the passage into the lagoon dead ahead. There was a waning moon over our counter; the night was clear, the dawn close at hand. I remembered the landmarks and coral heads as well as though they were the familiar ones in PukaPuka lagoon, so I decided to take *Hurry Home* to the anchorage and not even apprise the captain. Having Prospect on deck would spoil the charm of this home-coming. How much better to sail in quietly, alone, breathing deeply betimes of the spirit of this Happy Isle! And probably the captain would not even mention that he had not been called, for he takes pride in the belief that he chooses unerringly men who can take better care of his vessel than he, and he delights in having his judgment vindicated in singular if not spectacular ways.

Oli-Oli was at the tiller, half asleep as usual. I sent him to his stewpot of a forecastle, telling him not to call Tagi. The fat cook rolled greasily across the deck and plopped down the hatchway; a moment later Johnny and Jakey crawled aft to stand beside me. I told them not to speak lest they waken the captain.

We made slow progress, for the wind was light and the last of the ebb tide was flowing out the passage. Anchorage Island lay over our starboard beam, a gloom-haunted mass of lowlying jungle less than a mile long. Presently it seemed more distinct, the stars faded, the first glimmer of a nether dawn lay phosphorescent and unearthly on Suvarrow's lagoon. Sea birds piped as they passed overhead on their way to the morning's fishing. Sometimes we could smell the land and the salty spray. The low thunder of reef combers filled the air and made us conscious of holy things; and to me these sensations were associated with the memory of Desire: I seemed to feel her presence welcoming us home with a pleasure both fierce and devoted.

It was only half light when we rounded the south point of Anchorage Island; then, out of the tidal swell, we became aware suddenly of the pattering of ripples on *Hurry Home's* side, the soft, unvarying splash of feathering water from her bow. Save for these scarcely audible sounds she moved in the lee of the land as silently as a ghost ship, as though reluctant to break the peace of this lonely land. When we were abreast of the stone wharf I brought the vessel into the wind and gave Johnny and Jakey the tiller to hold hard alee. Then, for a little time, I stood still, allowed my mind to go blank, and sensed the strange and sequestered beauty of this uninhabited place. I sensed the presence of the familiar spirit of place in the fragrant odor from the land, in the sustained drone of palm fronds, the clamor of birds, the deep undertone of reef combers rising and falling and mingling with the other sounds in a kind of fugue that expressed the loneliness and beauty of primitive things.

To me Anchorage Island was alive with memories of men who had lived in her fastness, had dug gold, weighed pearls, loved native women, caroused, fought, and died. Now Time and the Jungle had claimed Suvarrow; now the creeping and the flying creatures had returned to the fastnesses; now only memories of the old days remained.

The sky turned red and then dissolved to lighter shades. The dull glimmer of light on the lagoon ripples brightened to the glint of diamonds. Now we could see, far across the lagoon, misty and unreal, the coconut islets and sand cays that are threaded on Suvarrow's reef. The Tou Group and Bird Islet lay six miles to the west, Turtle, One Tree, and Brushwood to the north. Seven Islands and the Gull Group were almost lost against a bank of clouds to the southeast; Entrance and New islets lay like black squares above the horizon to the south; and Whale Islet, close at hand, seemed like a tiny and exquisite painting plucked from a book of fairy tales.

With a pang of regret that the happiness of this moment must give place to the humdrum monotony of life in the world of the flesh, I went forward and

let go the anchor. The jangle of chain grated on my spirit as harshly as it grated on its hawsepipe.

Chapter II

“TAGI! Where’s Tagi?” Captain Prospect growled, poking his head out of the companionway. “Takataka! Turn out that Palmerston Islander! Get all the gear out of Ropati’s canoe! He’ll want to go ashore and sleep, now that he’s brought my ship to anchor! Oli-Oli! Where’s that lazy Puka-Pukan? Where’s my tea? Why ain’t you got the water boiling? You’ve been asleep? Asleep! My knee!” The captain is always irritable before he has gulped his morning’s cup of tea.

Tagi and Takataka helped us slide our sailing canoe into the water, the cowboys piled into it, I followed them, and we shoved off. Captain Prospect and his crew would come later, in their own canoe, for seafaring men seem to find a sort of satisfaction in remaining on their ship a few hours after she has reached her port, perhaps to taste the joys of shore life in anticipation as they let their eyes rove here and there.

As we paddled through the shallows, alongside the stone wharf, hundreds of parrot fish finned past us with little spurts of fright, as though not knowing whether or not this strange, tailless, finless fish were an enemy. The wharf itself, we noticed, was broken where heavy seas must have bashed it. After pulling the canoe up the beach we moved inland along a weed-grown path to the clearing in the center of the island. The jungle of young coconuts, pemphis, and pandanus walled us in; it was so dense that we could scarcely hear the thunder of breakers on the fringing reef less than a quarter of a mile away—or perhaps the thunder was lost in the sustained clamor of sea birds roosting in the trees and circling overhead. The air was damp, and heavy with jungle smells; but now and then a breath of wind would eddy down to touch us lightly, then vanish, leaving us with a vague feeling that we had smelled the sea.

The cowboys yelled their excitement. Within two minutes they had plunged into the jungle in search of sprouted coconuts, green drinking nuts, coconut crabs, and sea-bird fledglings. As for me, I moved through the early-morning gloom of this uninhabited place with a feeling of religious awe. I sensed that I was trespassing in a fairyland where only children are permitted to roam. The spell was complete until I came to the south side of the clearing and saw the galvanized-iron roof over the brick water tank, testifying that other mortals had dared break into this sanctuary. The bright unpainted iron stood out in pleasing contrast against the deeply shadowed green.

I have mentioned the “clearing”—which formerly extended for two hundred yards down the center of Anchorage Island—but in truth it is a clearing now only in contrast with the heavy jungle surrounding it. There are thickets of spiny-leaved pandanus, nonu and tamanu saplings, a few clumps of

bananas and mummy apples, breadfruit trees, young coconuts, all tangled with triumfetta vines, gardenia and ficus bushes, and coarse atoll ferns. The only clear ground in the clearing is under five gigantic tamanu trees, which stand in a row about fifty yards from the tank. It was there that I found an old pearly cutter, paintless, mastless, its hull full of leaves and dead branches, and at one side of the tamanus I stumbled on the wreck of the old trading post, now scarcely more than a heap of rusty iron and rotten wood, but with part of one wall standing by virtue of the supporting jungle. The door still hung in its doorway, for the hinges were of bronze.

I found the cowboys, and it was not long before we had kindled a fire, and not long thereafter before three coconut crabs and six fledglings were on the coals, sizzling and sputtering and filling the air with a savory odor. We made a meal of it, eating the food with our fingers, filling the odd corners with sprouted-coconut utos, and washing it all down with cool drinking-nut water.

After the meal, a smoke, and a nap we built a wigwam of green coconut fronds in a little glade opening to the lagoon beach; and later we walked to the north point, where there is a deep hole on the edge of the shallows— Captain Prospect’s Spa—and plunged in to turn somersaults, stand on our heads, swim sharkwise and turtlewise, and in other ways enjoy ourselves after the manner of old men and children.

And tonight, while writing these words by campfire and at times pausing to stare at the dim shape of *Hurry Home* riding at anchor, I have wondered if it is fair play to be so happy when the rest of the world is in tears.

This afternoon Captain Prospect and I rummaged about the wreckage of the old trading post. We found some lumber good enough for the framework and floor of a temporary house, but all the iron roofing was rusted beyond further use—even to the captain’s sanguine eyes. For a long time he refused to admit it. He would squint at a rusty, torn, and bent piece of iron, nod his head, and, “Perhaps there’s a little life left in that piece,” he would venture. “What do you think, Ropati?” “It’s nothing but rust,” I would reply. “No, no,” the captain would then insist, and, leaning over, he would try to pull it out of the wreckage; but when it fell to pieces in his hands he would admit that, yes, it was somewhat damaged—damaged being from the Latin: *Damn-a age-a*—damned by age.

We turned back to the clearing and inspected the twenty-foot pearly cutter.

“Well, Ropati, you’ll have to admit that there’s still some life left in the old boat,” the captain said as he pulled dead tamanu branches out of her and started thumping her planks and picking the scales of paint from her sides.

“Yes, she’s not beyond repair,” I admitted, and added that she might be useful, when the tourist resort was established, to take the big-game fishermen out to sea or the lady tourists to the jungle expeditions on Seven Islands.

"Hm, yes," the captain agreed, taking me seriously. "She'll settle the inter-lagoon transportation problem... I'll put Oli-Oli to work on her right away. I'll have him replace those rotten frames and those floors and knees. And that plank," he added, kicking it and then pulling his foot out of the hole he had made, "yes, that plank will have to be renewed; and I think she'd better have a new stem and a sternpost too. The keel may be sound, but if it's not, then Oli-Oli can cut a new keel from one of these big tamanu trees." He stopped abruptly, grinned waggishly, and then told me that the chain plates, being bronze, were in good shape, so at worst Oli-Oli would simply have to build a new boat between them.

A few moments later we turned to the tamanu trees, standing in a row, close together, on the north side of the clearing. Each was as big as an English oak, had the same dark, glossy leaves and gnarled limbs. Because they leaned at about forty-five degrees to the west, Captain Prospect found them easy to climb. In a moment he had clambered up one of them to where it forked twenty feet from the ground, and had perched birdlike on one of the smaller limbs. I of course followed, somewhat bewildered and with a lively sense of the unconventionality of climbing trees with a gray-haired skipper. I hoped First Mate Tagi-would not see us.

"Nice place to build a house," the captain opined, producing his calabash pipe and lighting it. Then, as he blew a series of smoke rings and sighed with the satisfaction that only tobacco and weak tea bring him, he pointed out the vistas of reef and sea to the east and the lagoon to the west, interposed by the boles of coconut trees that rose above the jungle; and he called my attention to the light drafts of wind; and finally he told me that, in a little house in these trees, a man would be as safe in a hurricane as he would be aboard *Hurry Home*.

"That's right," I replied. "I'm going to build a house up here. I'm going to live in a tree, like Swiss Family Robinson."

"I remember that book; it was by Nat Gould," the captain informed me; then he offered me my pick of the old trading-post lumber to build the house.

I had not thought of such a house until that moment, but, sitting in the tree with the captain, I at once realized how easily it could be built. There was another tree within eight feet of the one we were sitting in, and there were forks on it at about the same height. I visualized a beam stretched from this tree to that one, another yonder, a post here and a brace there. In a moment the house was snugly nested in a great mass of foliage, a ladder led to the ground, and I myself was stretched out on a bunk by a big open window, feeling the wind on my bare chest as I stared dreamily across the jungle to the passage, the reef, the open sea, the vagrant clouds.

"I am quite serious," I said when we had climbed down the tree and were studying the house site from ground level. "I'll go to work on it right away."

I was enthusiastic. It was not until later in the day that I decided to work leisurely on the house, timing the construction so it would be half finished

when *Hurry Home* sailed back to Nassau to discharge her cargo. The half-finished house would give me an excuse for remaining here with the cowboys until Prospect returned.

I woke this morning at 4 A.M., well before the first sign of dawn and because I was thoroughly refreshed I went about cooking breakfast at once. It amounted only to kindling the fire, putting on the teakettle, and breaking out a dozen ship's biscuits and a tin of jam. When the tea had been brewed and I had sipped a few spoonfuls I called the cowboys, gave them their bread and jam, and sent them to the basket of drinking nuts for the rest of their breakfast.

It was a skimpy meal, and that is why we got thinking about wide-awake eggs and decided, before we had finished our biscuits and jam, to go to Whale Islet and the Bird Cays. There would be time before the tide came in, we miscalculated, to walk to the cays and back.

We rummaged about until we found some frond baskets for the eggs and some two-pound beef tins for testing their freshness. There was still no sign of dawn when we moved down the path to the lagoon beach and followed it to the north point; but when we were tramping along the reef shallows, now bone dry, we became aware of the first candlelight of dawn like a little cloud of mist flung up from the reef spray.

The coral on the inner side of the reef was smooth walking even for the littlest daughter, who trailed along behind the others, swinging her frond basket and piping a songlet as pretty and simple as herself. Johnny and Jakey ran hither and thither, chasing fish in the crevices and pools or yelling with mock terror when they spotted a conger eel. Elaine stayed close to the boss of the outfit, as she always does.

"Papa-look!" she cried abruptly, pulling my arm and at the same time pointing to tiny Whale Islet, now behind us. "It is like the island in the funny paper—the little island in the middle of the ocean, with only two or three trees and a man and a woman and a raft."

We stopped at a reef pool to fill our beef tins with salt water, and then we spread over the cays, rousing the birds from their nests. Bedlam broke loose. The birds rose, wheeled, banked, dove in confusion worse confounded. Their clamor seemed a palpable substance, filling the air and our very bodies as well. Their excitement was contagious. The cowboys dashed this way and that, their eyes flashing, their little throats screaming a close second to the pandemonium of the birds.

I tried to keep my wits and gather a few eggs, but I soon found that most of them on the Bird Cays were far advanced in incubation. Picking up a fresh-looking egg, I would drop it in my tin of water. If it lay on its side in the bottom of the tin it was fresh, if it stood an one end it had started to incubate, and if it floated the incubation was far advanced. By the time we had reached the last cay I had found only a dozen or so fresh eggs, and a dozen or so eggs

are only an appetizer for my family. We needed several hundred, both for ourselves and for the crew of *Hurry Home*, each one of whom would think nothing of putting away five dozen eggs at a single meal.

We decided to move on, a mile farther along the reef to Brushwood Islet. The tide was low, and, miscalculating a second time, we believed we could make it to Brushwood and back to Anchorage Island before the reef was flooded. So we left our basket of eggs on the last cay and struck out to the edge of the barrier reef, where it was dry walking save for an occasional sea that washed languidly past our ankles. In the shallow pools we could see, when the foam had cleared away, scores of bright-blue parrot fish and brown-mottled reef cod. We could have picked them up with our hands. There were lobsters too, but we could see only their long feelers thrust out from holes in the coral.

When we were opposite the south point of Brushwood we left the reef to wade to the beach through a channel two feet deep and a hundred yards across. We might have noticed then that the tide was flowing, but our brains were so excited by the wild scene before us that we were scarcely aware of the current flowing alongshore toward the lagoon; nor did we give more than a passing glance at the sharks that circled round us and sometimes charged for our legs only to stop suddenly when a few feet away and then, perhaps seeing our bodies above the water, charge away faster than they had come. One big shark, hungrier than the others, brushed my leg with his tail.

On a quiet day, far from the screaming birds and the roar of breakers, the sharks might have put us in a blue funk; but today we felt as reckless as the sharks themselves. We felt like kicking them or, as Jakey often says, eating them alive—and all because of the contagious excitement about us. If there were tens of thousands of birds on the cays there were hundreds of thousands here. The sky was so thick with them that in places they cast a solid shadow. In each pemphis bush squatted row on row of long-faced boobies, owl-eyed, serious and professorial in their bearing, with rings around their eyes like the rims of spectacles; and row on row of frigate birds, glossy black, with wattles as big and red as a turkey's, eyes red and utterly cruel, birds as emblematic of evil as the raven. They eyed us with a sort of calculating detachment, with cold objectivity, snobbishly. Sometimes, when we approached, they would rise clumsily to coast down-wind a few yards to the next bush; at other times they seemed to defy us. But when Jakey knocked one from his perch his expression changed suddenly from contempt to righteous indignation.

He squawked in remonstrance; he flapped this way and that as gracelessly as a tumbling pigeon; then he soared away, while from Elaine, the humorist of the family, came squeals of unsympathetic laughter.

Perhaps we were the first humans these birds had seen; perhaps a few of them had looked down to the decks of ships to observe incuriously the wingless bugs that poked their heads from holes, turned wheels, squawked some unknown tongue, and smoked pipes.

Fresh wide-awake eggs were everywhere, on an average of about four to each square foot of sand. We had to walk with care to avoid trampling them. We bagged ten noddy-tern fledglings and five boobies, filled our baskets with eggs, and then inspected the Turtle. We had seen her from afar, stranded on the reef that fringes the lagoon side of Brushwood, dragging her three hundred pounds, at the rate of about a foot a minute, toward the lagoon. Such a turtle on Puka-Puka would have fed the entire island; and Elaine must have been thinking something of the kind, for she shook her head regretfully and told me that a lot of good turtle soup was going to waste. Then she forgot her preoccupation in food, for Johnny and Jakey had mounted the creature, Nga was squealing for a ride, and Elaine was not going to let any cowboy outdo her. We wasted a good ten minutes while the cowboys rode their bronco ten feet along the fringing reef; then, thinking for the first time of the tide, we hurried back to the south point.

The channel was flooded three feet deep! That was bad. To be marooned on Brushwood, where there was no water, during a tide would be uncomfortable indeed. Water suggested rain. We glanced to windward to see a black squall bearing down on us. Well, we studied the mile of open reef to the Bird Cays and decided we could make it. I took Elaine and Nga on my shoulders, slung the baskets of eggs and the birds over my arms and neck, and with Johnny and Jakey clinging to me we started across.

Though there were no sharks in the channel I felt something akin to panic until we had made the reef. Here in the South Seas we are convinced that sharks will attack a man carrying fish or sea birds but will not molest him otherwise. This may be no more than one of our superstitions, but because I believe it my knees were "unstrung." Had a shark charged us I should not have had the strength to kick him, and I doubt if the fierce Jakey would have thought seriously of eating him alive. In fact we wasted no time plowing through the deep water and climbing on the reef, where, the water being only knee-deep, I let Elaine and Nga walk. We splashed along in grand style for half a mile; then the seas became higher or the reef lower, for more and more often big combers surged past us, and I had to brace myself while the cowboys, holding to my hands and belt, were flung away from me like streamers in the wind. One big wave actually did wash us into the shallows; but we scrambled back to the reef, and it was then that we threw away our birds. We kept the baskets of eggs.

The last stretch was very bad indeed, for we had to leave the reef and all but swim through a channel to the first sand cay; and it was then that the big squall roared down on us. The rain seemed almost as solid as the water we waded through. With Elaine and Nga on my shoulders again, Johnny and Jakey holding to my belt and each swimming with one hand, the baskets of eggs slung around my neck and over my arms, I put my back to the squall and plowed through the swiftly flowing water to the first cay. There we retrieved the other basket of eggs and then skirted along the lee side of the cays to

Whale Islet, making it just as the last of the squall was pelting us. Another squall was humping its back over the horizon to windward; a single glance at the reef between Whale Islet and Anchorage Island convinced me that we could not reach home until the tide had ebbed, so we broke inland, found a good place for a shelter, and proceeded to make a lean-to of coconut fronds. It was finished in half an hour-in time to huddle under it while the next squall yelped in the fronds and spattered the islet with rain. After the squall we decided that food and drink were indicated.

My matches were soaking wet, but that did not deter us. We found a guettarda stick, whittled away its wet outer wood, and used it for a hearth log. A pemphis stick furnished a fire-plow, and the old man furnished the power to plow a little pile of smoldering wood dust out of the log. The wood dust was dumped on a segment of dry coconut husk and blown to a blaze; coconut spathes and pemphis twigs were piled on top until we had a roaring fire.

Then we built another fire, in a shallow pit, and piled lumps of coral on it. While the coral was heating we gathered the big unfluted leaves of sprouted coconuts and wrapped five dozen eggs in them. These we laid on the hot stones, when the fire had died down, and covered them with leaves and sand.

Jakey gathered a number of drinking nuts while the rest of us hunted for utos, and when that part of the meal was laid out on Suvarrow's willow-pattern dishes the eggs were cooked.

It was raining again, but we didn't give a whoop. The old man had had a smoke, we each had drunk a few coconuts, and we were protected from the rain in a fairly tight makeshift house. So we feasted in the Homeric manner; the old man had another smoke, and the cowboys took a few puffs to show they were hard-boiled. By that time it was late afternoon. We rolled down to the beach, saw that the reef was drying, returned for our baskets of eggs, and rolled happily home.

The bathing pool on the north point of Anchorage Island lies in the hard coral conglomerate of which the point is formed. It is a miniature bay. The entrance to the bay is only a foot deep at low water, but the pool itself has a good four feet of water, is round, about sixteen feet across, and has a bottom of smooth yellow coral. On a sunny day it is warm almost to hotness. Just beyond the mouth of the pool is a channel two feet deep and twenty wide, leading from a depression in the barrier reef across the shallows to the lagoon. Because the water in the channel flows swiftly from the sea it is always cool.

At low tide this Sunday afternoon Captain Prospect, the cowboys, and I followed the lagoon beach to the north point, there to stew in the hot pool and shiver in the cold stream while betimes we discussed this and that from the Latin roots of obscure words to the works of Nat Gould. Presently the cowboys, fed up with our erudition, went chasing fish in the shallows; and presently the captain started talking about his scheme to start a tourist resort

on lonely Suvarrow.

“I can just see them, Ropati!” he exclaimed after he had warmed to his subject in exact ratio to the warmth imparted to his skinny body by the hot water in the pool. “Just use your imagination. Picture poor sun-hungry people from New Zealand and England and the States in this natural-ah-spa! Picture society ladies sitting under beach umbrellas up there on the high coral by the fresh-water pools, watching their children romp about the reef—just like yours are romping now—and all the rheumatics and lungers sweating themselves into health, here in the pool! I don’t doubt for a minute but what they’ll pay me a bob an hour just to let them bathe here!”

At this point I suggested that we wallow through the shallow entrance to the cold stream, which we did. As I had expected, the cold water chilled the captain’s dream. He reduced the admittance fee from a bob to a tanner, and then, as his teeth started to chatter, he magnanimously opened the pool to his invalids free of charge, but made a nominal charge of sixpence for tea served under the beach umbrellas. I asked him what kind of a joint he proposed putting up on Suvarrow,

“I don’t propose putting up any joint at all,” the captain spat at me. “I propose establishing a high-toned health resort. First of all I’ll build six cabins in the hold of my ship. That’ll settle the transportation problem. Then I’ll have Tagi and Takataka clear about five acres right down the center of Anchorage Island, and I’ll have Oli-Oli build a dozen or so little native huts for the guests and one big house that’ll be both a dining room and a clubhouse. There I’ll put my radio and rig up a windmill affair for charging the batteries—and that’ll pretty well settle the amusement problem. The young people will dance to radio music, and the older ones will listen to the news and the stockmarket quotations... . But there’ll be other amusements: draughts, chess, and cribbage; big-game fishing, jungle expeditions, and historic monuments; tennis, ping-pong, and golf; and for highbrow blighters like you I’ll have a bookshelf with the complete works of Nat Gould.”

At that he rolled over, got a handhold and a foothold and, after raising the part of his anatomy covered by his pink bathing trunks, he straightened up to haul his bony self back to the warm pool. I followed.

“Golf, Ropati, golf!” he exclaimed when he had again stretched out, this time with his head on a shelf of coral. “Use your imagination, man! Can’t you see that Suvarrow has the finest natural golf course in the world? My God, man! The place is simply crying out for someone to exploit it! Let me put my sailors to work for one week and I’ll have a golf course that will attract players from the four comers of the world!

“Listen,” he continued, his voice rising as his scheme unfolded, his arms working in violent and yet more violent gesticulations. “Listen, now: the first green right here on Anchorage Island, with a little clubhouse where the players can buy spare balls at a moderate profit to me of about twenty-five per cent. From the first green they drive down the reef shallows, at low tide, to the

second green on Whale Islet. What a fairway! just look at it, Ropati! Use your imagination! Bone dry and almost as smooth as a billiard table! Well, from Whale Islet there'll be the Bird Cay Hazard and then the third green on Brushwood, the Water Hazard from Brushwood to Green IV on One Tree, and then a straight fairway across the channel to Turtle Islet—Green No. V.

"The tide will be coming in by the time they reach Green No. V," the captain continued, his excitement increasing alarmingly, "so all the twosomes and foursomes, the spectators, and the caddies will rest on Turtle Islet for a few hours and refresh themselves with tea and cakes at, say, one and sixpence a player. I'll have Oli-Oli established permanently on Turtle Islet to serve refreshments!"

"Yes, yes, Captain!" I cried, noting that his eyes were becoming fixed in a glassy stare, but aware that he was drunk only on the wind of optimism; that he was seeing files of twosomes and foursomes, in plus fours, caps, and brogues, tramping the reef to Turtle Islet, while caddies dashed this way and that, while golf balls soared o'erhead, winging the wide-awakes; that he was seeing hungry players lined at the resthouse—sixpence extra for jam with your cakes... .

"Next low tide," the captain continued, "they'll drive down to the sixth green on Bird Islet, then Greens VII and VIII on the Tou Group, where there'll be a resthouse for them for the night. But early the next morning they'll be playing again, driving along the fairway to Green IX on the Buckland Cays, Green X on New Islet, Green XI on Tirel Cay, Green XII on Entrance Island, and Greens XIII and XIV on Seven Islands, where again they'll take tea and cakes while the tide is high. But when the shallows dry they'll be off again, on the home stretch now, driving to the last three greens, on the Gull Group ... and then, Ropati! and then—think of it—the Passage Hazard! The greatest obstacle ever encountered by a golfer! Only the longest drive will clear the Great Passage Hazard! It will be unique! Just imagine a golf ball soaring skyward from the Gull Group, describing a parabola high above the shouting seas on the barrier reef, high above the passage itself, to land squarely on the Home Green on Anchorage Island!"

"Making," I screamed, "a hole in one! ... Quick, Captain, quick! Jump in the cold stream!"

But Captain Prospect caught my implied meaning. His frenzy slipped off him; he eyed me sourly, snarled something about my unimaginative plebeian brain, hauled his bony self out of the water, and returned in high dudgeon to the clearing.

Takataka has finished the little native shack by the water tank. It is about ten feet wide by sixteen long, with a frond roof, open sides, and a board floor: a good-enough place to crawl into when it rains—and what more does a man want with a house in the tropics?

Oli-Oli is progressing famously with the pearling cutter. He finds that it is in better shape than we had thought. Apparently the plank that the captain

kicked his toe through was the only rotten one in the boat. We have moved the cutter to the south side of the tank, at the end of the path leading to the lagoon. The captain has decided not to launch her until he returns from Nassau and Manihiki.

I have laid the floor of my treehouse. Captain Prospect is delighted—and at the same time exasperated because the work progresses so slowly. He tells me that as soon as he returns from Nassau he will put all three sailors to work on his Arboreal Villa. There will be the Aerie, the Nest, the Roost, the Hermitage, the Monkey House, the Rookery; and others later, when, I more than half believe, he can think of names for them. There will be footbridges from Aerie to Roost to Monkey House, ladders to the ground, dumb-waiters for hauling up one's tea and cakes, spyglasses for watching the golf tournaments on the barrier reef.

Tagi has been working on *Hurry Home*, puttering about every morning until about nine o'clock, when, the pangs of hunger telling him that another meal will soon be indicated, he gets out his fishline, baits his hook with hermit crabs, drops it over the side, and in no time catches enough fish for all of us.

This morning the captain and I went aboard with Tagi, not giving him time to hunt for hermit-crab bait. "Maybe he'll get the standing rigging set up," Captain Prospect growled as we paddled out to the ship, "now that he can't fish."

With the three of us aboard it seemed that the work actually might be done, but alas! the flesh is frail. Within a half hour the captain had lost interest; within thirty-five minutes he had left the job to Tagi and had lured me into his cabin for a rubber of cribbage.

After winning two games the captain's stony heart softened. "We might as well let Tagi catch a few fish for lunch," he said. "I don't believe in being too hard on sailors ... and anyway, he'll be expecting bully beef if there's no fish."

"Bully beef is three bob a tin now."

"Yes, it's exorbitant."

"Exorbitant—*orbitas*: that's from the Latin, isn't it?"

"I doubt it," said the captain sourly, then he poked his head out of the hatchway and called for Tagi. "You can lay off now, if you want, and catch some fish," he said when the mate had come aft.

"I got no bait," Tagi replied, both peeved and vindictive.

"Bait—my knee! Whoever heard of a sailor up against it for bait?" He scowled, let his eyes dart this way and that, and, "Here's some prunes," he suggested, picking one from the rubbish at the back of the table.

But Tagi would have none of the prunes, so the captain got out his queer fishing tackle consisting of a big clumsy hook, a length of seizing wire, and a few fathoms of sennit. He jabbed a prune on the hook, took the outfit on deck, dropped the hook over the side, and pulled up a red schnapper. Then, highly pleased with himself, he gave the fish to Tagi, for—bait, and, turning to me,

offered to shout me a cup of weak tea if I would kindle the fire.

"No one would believe it," he told me later, "if you said you caught fish with prunes." Then, with the light of an idea in his eyes, he went on: "When my tourist resort is established I'll put a big sign down on the wharf: FISHING EXCURSIONS. YOUR MONEY BACK IF YOU DON'T CATCH A FISH... That'll get 'em!" he affirmed. "Two bob an hour, with hooks and lines thrown in."

Hurry Home sailed at noon; the cowboys and I have been left on Suvarrow until Captain Prospect returns, in two or three months, from Nassau and Manihiki. We have been marooned by request, as the captain put it. Perhaps the half-finished treehouse influenced his decision to leave us, as well as our offer to clear away the wreckage of the old trading post and cut a trail to the outer beach.

I went aboard early this morning to buy a few provisions and take ashore some odds and ends of personal gear; but when it came to my case of books, weighing fully two hundred pounds, I decided to leave it aboard for ballast. I had reading matter enough ashore anyway, with Montaigne, Lamb, Spengler, *The Friendly Arctic*, *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, and a few other books.

After we had carried our provisions from the beach to the clearing we sat on the end of the wharf and watched *Hurry Home* drag herself away from the anchorage. We went through the convention of waving, then we crossed the island to its east side, where we sat under a bush; and after an interminable time we saw *Hurry Home* nose her head around the south point and flounder into the passage. There she seemed to take wing like T. S. Eliot's hippopotamus. Resting her belly in the current, she seemed for a little time firm enough; but "flesh and blood is weak and frail, susceptible to nervous shock," we recited as the ebbing tide caught her and rushed her down the passage at a good five knots—at twice the speed she makes in a gale of wind with all her sails drawing! She struck the nasty tide rip; the wind fell light in the lee of the land; twice she was turned completely around, then she was laid squarely in the trough, rendered helpless, and given such a rolling that we could scarcely ascertain whether she was belly up or back up to the sky.

Poor old Captain Prospect and his crew must have been in a blue funk. We could all but hear their yells as each one of them, from the cook to the skipper, took charge at once, and each one yelled orders that were heard by only himself. The sails thrashed back and forth. First one rail was under water, then the other. The current swung her head to the sea and she buried her bows under, then her stern to the sea, and a nasty chop crashed down on her tin-trunk stove and her w.c. And when she had been bashed this way and that for a quarter of an hour she was swept within yards of the point of reef on the west side of the entrance, where the seas humped their backs before crashing down on the barrier reef. Apparently all hope was gone; her crew were

doomed to feed the voracious sharks or be bashed to death on the jagged coral, when ...

The cowboys were whooping now. Jakey and Nga had dashed down to the beach; Johnny sat by me, gripping my arm; Elaine was crying; and I—for the life of me I could feel no proper horror or even concern. The ‘potamus was about to take wing, I reflected.

“And him shall heavenly arms enfold,
Among the saints he shall be seen
Performing on a harp of gold—”

My quotation was broken off suddenly. Johnny relaxed; Elaine stopped crying; Jakey and Nga stopped whooping. With a leer of irony—or perhaps with dismay at the thought of the hippopotamus performing on a harp of gold—Poseidon, girdler of the earth, sent a puff of wind into *Hurry Home*’s sails and literally pushed her sideways out of danger.

Then we ashore watched Captain Prospect’s “hollow ship” get snappily under way. She showed her scabby bum to the barrier reef; up went her staysail, the tack where the peak should be; and away raged *Hurry Home* “over the wet ways of the teeming sea” at a good two knots if not a two-point-five. She was a mile off when the cowboys glanced over their shoulders in a meaningful way, then rose, and led me back to the clearing and the cookhouse.

Chapter III

TEA this morning at half-past four, ship's biscuits, and three dozen wide-awake eggs between the five of us; then we went to work in earnest on the treehouse. Jakey worked as steadily as a boy can, salvaging galvanized nails from the wreckage of the trading post; Johnny plaited roofing sheets from green coconut fronds; Elaine and Nga bossed the job when they were not minding their babies—that is, their long, slim, undeveloped coconuts wrapped in rags and tags.

Now that *Hurry Home* has left there has been no excuse for delaying the work. The sun had scarcely risen before I had cut a score or two of green nonu saplings, strong, tough, and flexible. These made window sills, rafters, and ridgepole. By noon the framework was complete; then Johnny and I cooked a pot of rice, opened a tin of bully beef, and we made a meal of it, polishing off with a couple of green coconuts each. This afternoon I helped Johnny with the roofing sheets while Jakey went to the reef with his spear. By the time Jakey returned with enough fish for all of us Johnny and I had finished the forty sheets needed for the roof. For the evening meal we boiled some unleavened dumplings made from grated coconut and flour, grilled our fish on pemphis-wood coals, and brewed ourselves a cup of tea. Then, there being a moon three quarters full, we went to work lashing the sheets on one side of the roof and finished the job by 8 P.M.

The little house has a fascinating look by moonlight. I can scarcely keep my eyes off it. I shall sneak away from the children and sleep in the little monkey nest up the tree.

We put the rest of the roof on the house yesterday morning, then plaited coconut fronds on the sides, and finished the job by night. These plaited fronds give both a beautiful effect and a raintight shelter. Today Johnny made two big blinds, six feet by thirty inches, for the two windows, and I hung them on the lintels so they could be raised or lowered. Also I made a bunk on the east side of the house, and I am lying on it at this moment. By turning my eyes to the right I can look over the undergrowth and see, between the boles of coconut trees, vistas of the passage, the east reef, and the Gull Group beyond. The trade wind blows fresh and fragrant through the house. In a half hour, when it is dark, I will see the moon over the far islets, splashing mild yellow light on the fierce tide rip that will then be flowing out the passage.

I have made a writing table from the south end of the bunk across the house to its west side. A kerosene case with a back nailed to it serves for a

chair. My mat, pillow, and quilt are on the bunk, and under it are the children's sleeping things, while on the table are my typewriter, dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedia, a half-finished novel, and numerous papers. Under the table is a little chest with papers, ribbons, letters, and odds and ends. Also there is a shelf by my head, and on it smoking paraphernalia, Lamb's *Letters*, Montaigne's *Essays*, Spengler's *Decline*, Stefansson's *Friendly Arctic*, and a few volumes of lighter reading.

Only one thing troubles me: there is a tall coconut tree leaning over my house, with its head above the tamanu trees and therefore above the roof. The tree is loaded with coconuts, and I have been wondering if one might fall, go through the roof, and land on me! Probably not, for the rafters are a foot apart and the roofing sheets close together. However, it is a troubling thought, so tomorrow morning I shall send Jakey up the tree to throw down the nuts. Incidentally, Jakey, though not too hot at the three Rs, is a number-one hand at climbing trees.

It is late twilight. I can see the moon, just below the eaves and hedged on two sides by coconut fronds. The roar of seas on the barrier reef comes loudly above the jungle; its thunder mingles with the sustained metallic tinkle of coconut fronds and comes to me as the peculiar voice of the spirit of place. The trade wind brings me the spirit's smell, but it is too subtle to evoke through the medium of words. Perhaps there is a tang of the salty sea spray, perhaps a spicy trace of the sea weed washed up on the beach, and perhaps a drop of the essential oil of pandanus flowers and those of the cordia, tamanu, coconut.

I wonder if, animal-like, most people identify places and things by their odor? If I read or think or hear the name Papeete no vision comes to my mental eye of a red-roofed cathedral or a market place, nor does there come to my mental ear the strumming of guitars or the babel of Chinese traders; but to my mental nostrils comes an undefinable smell, and instantly I identify the word Papeete with the smell.

This is a night of luxury. Not even the whoops of the cowboys jar my nerves, for they are on the end of the wharf fishing. My body feels strong and well and sensuously happy, and yet I feel my body to be something extraneous to my real self. I look down on my body, naked, brown as a Polynesian, functioning as perfectly as a finely geared machine, giving me pleasure and yet being another person than the Ropati that writes this entry. My body seems like a servant. My fingers are not I, but my sense of touch is; nor are my nostrils, my eyes, my ears, my palate the "I" that lives on Suvarrow with four children, but my senses of smell, sight, hearing, taste I identify with myself. These organs are instruments that I have acquired to keep me in touch with the external world. It seems—at this moment, at least—silly to believe the eyes can see, the ears hear: they are only instruments of

precision with which I can see and hear. Would you say a binocular can observe a ship, a telephone can carry on a conversation? The binocular is an extension of the eye, the telephone an extension of the ear; and the eye and the ear are extensions of the mind of man. At least so it seems to me tonight.

Primitive men do not differentiate so nicely. Tell a Puka-Pukan that the palate experiences no pleasure from a particular taste but is simply an apparatus for transmitting certain impressions to the brain, which in turn translates these impressions into a language that the mind delights in, and the Puka-Pukan will think you mad. To him his body is the whole man, and this, perhaps, is the reason he is so assiduous in his attention to the dead.

Oh well, by thinking back I find that I was discussing luxury

Tonight I feel that a cup of tea and a cigarette, and perhaps afterward an essay by M. Michel de Montaigne, would give me physical and spiritual pleasure more exquisite than I have ever known; for it is not the quality or the quantity of the good things of life that gives us pleasure, but it is our capacity to enjoy them. This afternoon, when I had finished the bunk and laid the sleeping things thereon, I determined, with a feeling of guilt, that I would relax for fully fifteen minutes. I looked at the ship's clock, which is on the east wall with the barometer, noted the time, lay back on the bunk, and relaxed save for my fingers, which rolled a pinch of tobacco in a pandanus leaf. I lit the cigarette, smoked slowly, inhaled deeply, breathed out the smoke through my nose, tasted the fragrant leaf, watched the wind carry the smoke away, and delighted in the mingled intoxication of tobacco and the sensuous pleasure that comes from feeling the wind blow over one's bare body. Only once was the complete "ataraxy" dispelled, and that was when I felt a sense of guilt at being so happy. It seemed to me that I was escaping a certain undefined duty to be miserable. Then, "Away with morality!" I cried. "I shall be a Heliogabalus! I shall be a remorseless sinner wallowing in the sensuous pleasure of a cigarette!" And so I did; and so it is that I now conclude that there is as much pleasure to be derived from insignificant pastimes as from the dissipations of a Trimalchio.

I am becoming long-winded and trite. One feels the need of prattle when living alone on a haunted island, and triteness is inevitable since Montaigne left no unharvested fields of thought for coming generations to reap Oh well, by the unholy row some twenty feet below me I conclude that four cowboys have returned with a string of fish and that they intend, without pain of conscience, to do some gargantuan guttling before they turn in to sleep the sound sleep of the well-fed.

We had a grand time on the reef this morning and a grand bird snaring this afternoon. The tide was low in the forenoon and the reef dry. Johnny and Jakey had short fish spears made of six-inch spikes seized on four-foot *nonu* poles; Elaine and Nga had frond baskets for periwinkles; the Boss of

Suvarrow had his heavy single-prong spear. Thus equipped, we walked to the north point, across the shallows, to the reef.

Every island has a reef peculiar to itself. On some the coral is so jagged, the crevices so wide and deep, that it is difficult to walk them even at low tide; but Suvarrow's reef is as smooth as a fairway. There would be no great difficulty in driving a golf ball from Anchorage Island the four miles to Turtle Islet. The combers break from thirty to forty feet to seaward of the highest part of the reef, and only the big ones lap over the reef shelf into the shallows.

"Captain Prospect's scheme is within the bounds of possibility," I reflected as I tramped toward Whale Islet. "The only difficulty would be in getting the golfers." Then, of course, I thought of the Arboreal Villa, jungle Excursions, the Spa and the Beach Umbrellas—until abruptly my attention was turned to a big parrot fish who, ostrich-like, had poked his head in a hole to leave three quarters of his body outside. I pulled him out, dropped him in my bag, and moved on.

There was little sport in spearing fish, for they were too plentiful. We did not have to hurl our spears like Achaean warriors in Ilion, and see them describe perfect parabolas before transfixing the fish. When we spied a big parrot fish or a reef cod in one of the pools, half hidden under a ledge of coral, we simply poked our spear in him, then flipped him up on the dry coral.

Jakey and Johnny soon tired of this. Sticking their spears in holes in the coral, where they could be retrieved later, they chased triggerfish and butterfly fish about the shallows until the gorgeous creatures took refuge under coral boulders, in holes and crevices. Then the children would reach in and pull the creatures out. Often the triggerfish would be hard to get out, and then, more than once, the little savages would duck their heads down and pull them out with their teeth! They killed them with their teeth too. This was a specialized business. The two older cowboys knew enough to hold the fish laterally and bite down on the back of their heads; but poor little Elaine, lacking in experience, thrust a triggerfish head first in her mouth and bit down. The fish retaliated by biting Elaine's tongue! Poor cowboy! She always makes a great to-do about her pains. Today her screams broke up the excursion for five minutes, while the old man comforted her and the rest of the cowboys suppressed their giggles as best they could. Elaine, however, has a sense of humor. She soon sees the comic side of her troubles—particularly so when the old man is comforting her.

"Poor Elaine! Cry, Elaine!" I said soothingly today as betimes I petted her and held her tightly. "Cry as loud as you can. It will do you good. Poor little cowboy! A big fish bit her tongue! Johnny, come here! Jakey! Nga! Don't you feel sorry for your sister? She got her tongue bit by a big fish!"

Presently I felt a slight convulsion in her fat little body and knew she was struggling to hold back a laugh. I insisted that she cry louder, as loudly as she could—like this—and I let out an awful yell. Elaine joined me, but ended the yell with a burst of laughter. The incident was closed. I placed her on the reef,

noting that her eyes were still streaming though she was chording with laughter. Probably her tongue still pained her, but, as I have said, she has a sense of humor. She'll probably turn out to be a very fat woman.

The quiet, gentle, diffident little Nga, the spiritual counterpart of her mother, nosed about the reef crevices and potholes like a mouse, sniffing here and there, poking her little paw into a hole to pick out a periwinkle or a cowrie shell, never screaming or showing any excitement, perfectly self-contained. Presently she showed me her basket full of shellfish and smiled in a way that said: "There you are, Papa. I don't make as much noise over my fishing as the rest of the cowboys do, but I bring home the bacon."

After climbing up the beach of the tiny storybook islet we inspected the lean-to we had built while *Hurry Home* was here. Elaine and Nga found a ghost-tern fledgling on a low limb of a tournefortia bush, and of course they fell in love with it—who wouldn't? It looked like a fuzzy little ball of cotton wool with two red eyes and a black beak, and, to the delight of the cowboys, it opened its mouth to exhibit an amazingly large gullet. Jakey climbed a coconut tree to throw down nuts for all of us, and after we had refreshed ourselves with food and water we proceeded to the Bird Cays—the same cays where we had gathered eggs a month before.

Now the eggs were all hatched, while under the bushes were thousands of wide-awake fledglings. So far as I know they are the only young sea birds that are agile on their legs; other sea birds can scarcely walk, and their fledglings can no more than push themselves across the sand. Wide-awakes scamper over the cays, in flocks of several hundred, precisely like baby barnyard chicks. They make a peeping noise, and, though I have not seen them scratch, they remind me of the speckled chicks of a Plymouth Rock hen. When watching them this morning, sometimes in flocks a thousand strong, scattering from one cay to the next, as identical as machine-made cigarettes, I marveled that the mother birds can find their fledglings.

The tide started to come in while we were on the cays, so we hurried back to Whale Islet, and from there waded to the inner edge of the reef, both because it was the shallowest place and because we had to retrieve Johnny's and Jakey's fish spears.

"There's a shark!" Elaine squealed presently.

"Two of them!" Nga corrected her.

The children gathered close to me, and we kept a sharp lookout. By the time we had retrieved the spears there were five sharks circling about us. Then a few heavy seas came over the reef to race across the shallows a good two feet deep. Johnny and Jakey braced themselves with their spears against the coral; I held Elaine and Nga. There were twelve sharks about us when the seas had gone down, and when we reached the "Spa" we counted twentyfive of the brutes within a hundred yards of us. It was one of the times I have wished there were other people on the island. I doubt that the sharks were after us, but they were after our fish and lobsters; and how they knew we were carrying

them I leave to someone else to decide.

We had a huge meal at noon; then the boss cowboy climbed into the treehouse for a smoke, an essay of Montaigne's, and a doze; but the rest of the cowboys had heard a flock of curlews piping their characteristic kee-u-ee cry. Food being their sole reason for living, the cowboys went after the birds. Johnny and Jakey got lengths of fishline, fixed small hooks on them, and baited them with hermit crab. They laid the baited hooks on the lagoon beach, close to the water, and scattered various legs and claws of hermit crabs about them. Then they brought the other ends of the lines up the beach and whistled the birds to them. It was simple enough. Any sort of a whistled kee-u-ee will attract a curlew. In a half hour they had six of the big, fat, delicious birds.

The birds made us a Homeric evening feast. Now the warriors are once again asleep, their bellies full, their souls at peace. The old man proposes to join them. Good night.

For two days and nights I was down on my back with filarial fever, while betimes a northwesterly gale was bawling outside our little treehouse and the children were living on coconuts, with not a whimper from them.

It was not a pleasant experience. It terrifies me to anticipate what might happen in a state of delirium—or what might happen were I to die! Think of these four children, aged four to ten, left alone on Suvarrow Atoll! ... Oh well, I should have thought of this before being marooned here by request; but I didn't, and that's the end of it; and anyway, our adventure in solitude has been delectable save for this one bout of fever.

All's well today. The old man has had an excuse to take things easy from dawn to dark, reading the *Letters of Charles Lamb*. I believe I am enjoying them more than I did at the first or the second reading. After an hour or two of oblivion to the present I lay the book down, and dully my eyes become cognizant of the familiar aspect of present-day Suvarrow while in spirit I am still in Lamb's London with Manning, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Dyer. Then I hear Johnny's voice, Jakey's. A feeling of mingled surprise and pain comes over me: surprise when I begin to remember I am on a South Sea island; pain because, for an instant, I feel that I have been neglecting my children—neglecting them since August 22, 1800, when Lamb's priceless letter to Manning was written. I have been neglecting my children! Perhaps they have forgotten me during the one hundred and forty-two years it has taken me to reach them from the London of Charles Lamb. Now I shall have to coax back their friendship, even renew their acquaintance.

We are working into a comfortable routine of life. Being in fine health again, I wake before daylight, fully refreshed and with no desire to lie a-mat.

Nevertheless I lie on my bunk in the treehouse long enough to roll a pandanus-leaf cigarette, light it, and take a few deep puffs as betimes I glance out the big window and decide that it will be a fine day. If there is a moon, as there is now, I can see the passage black as River Styx, and beyond it a misty line where the combers thunder over the east reef. The cigarette half finished, I bind on a loincloth and climb from the treehouse.

After the first bowl of coffee I remember that there are some cowboys in the treehouse. A thunderous roar wakens them; another roar informs them that it is a good morning; a third roar warns them that faces are washed and hair combed before breakfast.

Their morning meal consists of a drinking nut each, a ship's biscuit, an uto (the absorbing organ in a sprouted coconut), and anything that happens to be left over from the night before. They do not drink coffee or tea because they have been told that they may drink either whenever they wish. Likewise they do not make a habit of smoking or drinking whiskey because they know that I have no objection to their doing either.

After breakfast I take a walk along the beach as far as the Spa, and usually I take my fish spear with me, for octopuses are found easily in the early morning, and they make good bait. By the time I have returned the sun has risen, the children have washed the few cooking and eating utensils and cleaned the house and the clearing—which last requires a short explanation.

When Desire died I told my friends that I proposed to keep my children and bring them up without a woman's help. If my wife could bathe my son I opined that I could bathe my daughter, but as all my children could bathe themselves it should be necessary for me only to see that they did so. In other things I proposed to teach my children to take care of themselves. My friends were skeptical. They believed I would soon be fed up and would remarry or hire a nursemaid. Hire a nursemaid! For myself, perhaps, but certainly not for my children; and I need no nursemaid to take care of me so long as I have the children for the job.

It is wonderful how industrious children can be if left to their own devices. An unpleasant job becomes play to them if they are allowed to work at it in their own way and learn by their own mistakes; but any job becomes a chore when older people are overseeing them.

One of the nastiest chores about a South Sea house is keeping the yard clean; and this is a chore we expect our children to do, for their backs are limber, their fingers nimble, their eyes sharp. For a long time I failed to find a way to make policing the yard a pleasure; then by accident, here at Suvarrow, I discovered it.

"Jakey," I said one morning, "I'm going fishing. You take charge of the outfit and see to it that the women clean the yard."

Then off I pranced, without much attention to Jakey's grin of malicious glee or the angry glances of Johnny, Elaine, and Nga. When I returned I was met with a storm of protest. Jakey, it seems, had become drunken on the wine

of authority; Jakey had stuck out his chest, lowered his voice to a growling basso-profundo, made his eyes snap, and worked his sisters like slaves.

A critical situation had arisen, but with my usual discretion (quoting Captain Prospect) I smoothed things over at once by telling Johnny that she would be in charge tomorrow, Elaine the next day, and Nga the day after. Later I dropped a hint to Johnny that if she was too hard on the other children they would take revenge on their days.

The scheme worked. Johnny bossed her brother and sisters mildly, getting the job done well without starting any fist fights or even reports of cruelty to the lord of the aegis. When Elaine's day came it was a sight for a sore spirit to see the little dear almost in tears with happiness as, for the first time, she bossed her brother and sisters. Now and again she would gasp with emotion, her eyes would become soft and almost sensuously happy. "Rinse out the teakettle, Jakey!" she would command, and when the big cowboy obeyed without a murmur she would be so happy that she could not find the heart to work Jakey any more that day. But when Nga disobeyed her a little spark of anger came into her soft brown eyes, and her peppery cry to Nga came in a tone I had never heard her use before. Gentle little Nga looked up with eyes wide and mouth open, as surprised as I, and straightway did as she had been bidden.

When Nga's day came she made somewhat of a mess of things; but the children are fond of her and Elaine had forgiven her insubordination, so when she ordered them to burn down the cookhouse and fill the tank with sand they swept the yard and washed the dishes; and when she ordered her old man to make rock candy he obeyed without a murmur, being fond of rock candy himself.

I did not have to suggest that the experiment become a part of our household routine. They took this for granted, and from the first day started looking forward to their days of authority. Now there would be war in camp if I proposed abandoning the scheme. Incidentally, I let one of the children sleep with me each night, on the bunk in the treehouse, while the others sleep on the floor; and the child that sleeps with me is put in charge of the household the following day. Thus I can keep tally, and thus I can drop a few hints about the morrow's work. "What do you think, Johnny," I can ask, "wouldn't it be a good idea tomorrow morning before breakfast to inspect hair for combing and eyes and ears for washing?" "Good idea; just leave it to me," Johnny will comment, whereupon I know, beyond the slightest doubt, that hair will be combed, faces and ears washed, tomorrow morning before breakfast.

As for the old man, he eschews his turn at bossing the outfit, for he is too fond of his gang to deprive them of a recurrent day's pleasure; and anyway, as I have said, the old man is the only one in the outfit that requires a nursemaid.

When the yard is clean, the houses are tidy, the dishes washed, the boss of the day lines up the other three cowboys in the clearing below the treehouse, roars "'Ten-shun!" then marches down the line to inspect hair, eyes, cars, and

to see that no scholar has forgotten to dress for school. Then the three warriors are put through a little snappy drill, some calisthenics, and finally marched up the ladder into the treehouse for instructions in the Higher Learning.

Though Jakey is younger than Johnny, they are in the same class. I write them a page of English to be learned and copied, a page of arithmetic, and a page of drawing with captions and conversation, as in the comic papers. They are enthusiastic scholars, and solely, I verily believe, because they know I should prefer not to teach them and that I have not the slightest objection to their playing hookey anytime they wish.

Elaine has a page of English and lots of pictures to copy. Nga is given a carbon of Elaine's page, which she interprets, with the rare genius of a modern artist, into whirligigs and thingamabobs.

Jakey, being a real he-man, takes little interest in school learning. This should worry me, I suppose, but it doesn't. The trouble with Jakey is that he can't keep more than one thing in his head at a time. For a day or two I will drill him in the "put-togethers," and he advances rapidly. "What are two plus two plus two plus two?" I'll ask, and, after a little quick calculation on his fingers, he'll come out with the answer, correct every time. Then I'll switch to the "take-aways," and in three or four days he's better at 'em than at the put-togethers; but when I return to review the put-togethers I find that he has forgotten them, and when I brush him up on them I find that, in the process, he has forgotten the take-aways. At such times, seeing his usually happy face drawn and frustrated, I will brighten him, and myself, by quoting the Chinese poet:

*Families, when a child is born,
Want it to be intelligent.
I, through intelligence
Having ruined my life,
Hope only my child will be ignorant and stupid.
Then he will crown a successful career
By being a cabinet minister.*

This perks us both up; and if there is still a feeling of inferiority we remind ourselves that the younger one of us is a number-one performer at spearing fish, shying stones at roosting birds, standing on his head in the water, and climbing trees.

Johnny is very bright—too bright; and this is more troubling to me than Jakey's dullness, for Johnny becomes bored with schoolwork if it is too easy. She is in danger of finding life too easy for her, and hence tiring of life.

Elaine, I am, afraid, resents her lower grade, feels it is impossible to catch up with Johnny, and therefore suffers from mild frustration. I try to remedy this by giving her mostly drawing, at which she surpasses her older sister. This tickles Elaine into chortles of delight and does not worry Johnny. Nga is still too young to do much, but I keep her happy by admiring her whirligigs

and thingamabobs and calling them topsail schooners and automobiles.

School stops when the children have had enough. Then many things may happen. This morning Jakey went pole fishing off the south side of the island, the tide being too high to go on the reef. Johnny stayed at home, for she has a boil on her knee. Elaine and Nga did what they do virtually all the time: rustled food, ate, rustled more food, and ate some more. The old man continued work on his novel until noon, then kindled a fire in the native oven, made a sort of pudding of utos, grated coconut, and arrowroot starch, and baked it.

We had a big meal when Jakey came home with his fish; then I returned to the treehouse, this time to read a dozen pages of *The Decline of the West*, wonder if I really live in the same world Spengler writes about, and to go to sleep. I woke at about four and put in two hours of hard work clearing a path to the north point. Arrived there, and finding the children in the Spa, I joined them till dusk, to cool off and wash the sweat and grime from me.

In the evening we polished off the rest of our pudding and fish, built a fire with pemphis logs, laid out mats and pillows, smoked and told stories till eight or nine o'clock, when I returned to the treehouse, carrying the sleeping Nga, whose turn it is to occupy the bunk with me tonight.

After writing the above I blew out the hurricane lantern and stretched out on the bunk. I lay on my left side, with my back to the window facing the passage; and presently, through the window across the house, I saw, apparently a little to one side of Tou Islet, a light! It was too big for a star, and it glowed red, like a palm-frond torch. I laid Nga on the floor so she would not fall out of the bunk, woke Johnny, and the two of us climbed out of the house and hurried to the wharf. From there we could see that the light was a half mile to the north of Tou Islet and apparently suspended a little above the horizon. It did not move.

“What is it, Papa?” Johnny asked.

“That’s what I want to know,” I replied, and that’s what I want to know now. In about a half hour it disappeared suddenly, nor did it reappear, though we watched for fully an hour. Were it not that the wind is blowing fresh and the lagoon is too choppy for my sailing canoe I would go over to Tou tonight. Perhaps there are some shipwrecked sailors over there. Perhaps it was a signal of distress!

To give an impression of this exciting day will be hopeless unless one bears in mind the loneliness of Suvarrow, its complete isolation from the rest of the world. Try to imagine a ring of green islets that no one knows anything about or cares anything about. Try to hear the monotonous rumble of reef

combers, the screaming of sea birds, the wind's everlasting song in the palm fronds, which combine in the very language of solitude itself. Try to smell the clean breath of an island untainted by habitations. Try to feel the presence of the familiar spirit of this haunted place—the familiar spirit that has inhabited the sequestered groves for ages, only at long separated intervals to see strange man-creatures come ashore, to see fights, carouses, murders, and then the man-creatures, or those that survived, sail away, leaving the island for years or even decades to the flying and the creeping things and the spirits of the dead.

I felt strongly the loneliness of Suvarrow this morning as I trod the beach toward the north point, spear in hand. I was thinking, of course, of the strange light Johnny and I had seen the night before; and it was several seconds before I became conscious of something strange in the humming sound that came from across the lagoon. Then suddenly I associated the sound with Fiji, where Johnny and I were last year, and the next instant with the warplanes we had seen flying over Suva. My heart missed a beat and my knees went weak. Warplanes! Japanese! Suvarrow an air base for the enemy! All settlers on Suvarrow summarily dispatched with machine-gun fire! My children! They were a half mile away, too far to warn!

Then I saw the warplanes over Tou Islet—two of them! I did not have to dive for shelter: I had simply to step back a pace and the jungle swallowed me so completely that a man passing ten feet away could not have seen me. The hum of the warplanes rose quickly to a vicious roar. They were circling over Anchorage Island! I parted the leaves slightly and glanced up. One plane flew over me not three hundred feet away. On each of its silver wings I saw a star. I let the leaves close over me again and offered a little prayer that my children were as well hidden as I. What nation uses a star for its insignie? I wondered. Perhaps the United States. I hoped so but did not know.

The planes circled over the island for fully five minutes, then they roared away toward Turtle Islet; their noise diminished; they were gone.

I hurried back to the clearing to find that the children had taken cover like mice, crawling into a great heap of palm fronds. Needless to write all the exclamations, surmises that passed between us. Now we are wondering if the warplanes were associated with the light we saw last night. We are wondering if some vessel has been wrecked on the other side of Tou Islet, if there are castaways on Tou, and if the airplanes have been searching for them. On this supposition we sail for Tou tomorrow, the wind permitting.

Silver wings over Suvarrow! So there is another world, after all! So there is a war going on; my country is embroiled in it, and I should be almost anyplace except Suvarrow—anyplace where I can give some kind of aid to my country. Well, I can't swim to the U.S.A., and neither *Panikiniki*—my sailing canoe—nor the pearling cutter will take me there.

Chapter IV

WE SET OUT in *Panikiniki* (Skipping-stone) this morning for the six-mile sail across the lagoon to Tou Islet. For equipment we took a bush knife, a fish spear, matches, and tobacco: nothing else, for we enjoy using our wits to live when we go to the far islets. We consider a civilized picnic more nuisance than pleasure, and a camping trip, with almost everything from portable bathtub to medicine kit, the next thing to a nightmare. I say this advisedly, for often I have nightmares in which I am trying frantically and hopelessly to pack all the “essentials” for such an expedition. God save me from portable property! God save me from traveling with dozens of trunks, suitcases, hatboxes, bundles, and packages! God permit that I go through life like a child, with a spare shirt and a slingshot tied up in a handkerchief!

There was a mild breeze, but even so the crossing was unsafe, for Suvarrow’s lagoon, being almost free from coral heads and reefs, builds up an ugly chop. By the time we were beyond the lee of the land, skipping along under the full force of the wind, I wished we had taken a reef in the sail, not only because there was danger of *Panikiniki* capsizing but also because, when she sails faster than eight knots, she takes a good deal of water over her bows. Well, I got Elaine and Nga aft with me, so as to keep the bows well out of water, put Johnny and Jakey on the forward outrigger crossboom, and we flew along in grand style. But later, when the wind freshened a little, I had to send Johnny on the outrigger itself. She sat on its forward end, her back to the crossboom; and it must have been an exciting ride for her, sometimes skipping from wave to wave, sometimes swung a foot or two above the water, and sometimes ducked to her neck when the outrigger plowed through a wave. Jakey perched halfway out on the crossboom, steadying himself with one hand on the windward stay. Elaine and Nga were busy bailing.

With an outrigger canoe—mine, at least—a man cannot come about and return to his point of departure, for the canoe will capsize if the outrigger is on the lee side. To come about the canoe must be beached or sailed to shallow water where it can be held. Then the sail is lowered, the mast unstepped and then secured in the other end of the canoe, and the sail hoisted again. The outrigger must be always on the windward side.

So there was nothing for us to do but carry on, once we had started; and when we were halfway across I stopped worrying about the wind—I hoped it would freshen—for all at once I got to thinking about the warplanes—curse them! “What a perfect target we would make!” I thought with a shudder, and straightway fancied scores of enemy planes swooping down on us to spray us with machine-gun bullets And yet Captain Prospect claims I have no imagination! It was with a good deal of relief that I steered *Panikiniki* through

the mess of coral heads in Tou Islet's crescent-shaped bay and got the children ashore.

First we walked around the islet in search of castaways; but not a sign of one did we see, not even a footprint to fire the blood of Ropati Crusoe and family. On returning to the lagoon side, of the islet we found a place where it was possible to break through the thick shore bush and go inland; and this we did, at times creeping or even worming our way under the bush, or tramping over it, or cutting a path through it. The jungle was denser than it is on Anchorage Island, for there were thickets of cordia saplings, which do not grow on the other islets, and there were guettarda trees, and hernandia, impenetrable tangles of pemphis and pandanus, and in the center of the island as fine a grove of tou trees as I have ever seen.

There was less undergrowth under the tou trees. Glancing up, we could see thousands upon thousands of noddy terns, ghost terns, and boobies nesting in the branches. The air was rank with the miasma of decayed vegetation and sea-bird droppings; the thunder of reef combers came seemingly from far away, very faintly and hollowly, and somehow lugubrious. There was not a breath of wind. The clamor of the birds was so great that we had to shout to be heard; and all about us, climbing the trees, in every hollow log, under rocks and rubbish, or even on the open ground, scurried the coconut crabs, like prehistoric creatures, big-clawed, red-eyed, feeding on sea-bird fledglings and eggs.

In the deep gloom of the tou forest, hemmed in by jungle, with the clamor of the birds both exciting and bewildering me, I sensed that we had explored to a land beyond the edge of the world. I fancied that no human being had ever been there before. It gave me a panicky feeling. I sensed that I had gone too far, that I had gone back in time to a pre-man age, that an impenetrable curtain had dropped between me and the world of the twentieth century.

On the lagoon beach there was no place to make a camp, for the bush grew in a solid wall to the water's edge; but before moving on we pulled some drinking nuts from a low tree, drank their water and ate their meat, then had a smoke, and a council in which we decided to explore the other islets.

There are three islets to the south of Tou, with narrow channels between them. We poled the canoe to the first one, but found the bush so dense that we did not even attempt to break into it. The next one would have made a possible camping place, but there were only five coconut trees and not more than a rood of ground. The third islet looked no more promising at first, but when we had poled the canoe to its south point we found as pleasant a camping place as one could wish for. A white coral beach shelved into a narrow channel six feet deep, while beyond the channel the reef shallows, now dry, curved away to Jack Buckland's Cays and New Islet. Above the beach was a clump of tournefortia bushes, about twenty feet high and with walking room under most of their branches. Their leaves gave partial shade, so there was none of the gloom and dampness of the jungle, nor was it too hot

and glaring. A colony of ghost terns had laid their eggs in the forks of the branches, and now the limbs were spotted with white fledglings. We could see on the top of each fuzzy head the black stripe they had inherited from their famous ancestor whom the god Maui had marked with his firebrand. The mother birds, returned from sea, fluttered like butterflies in the shadows.

We pitched our camp under a big *tournefortia* bush, within a few feet of the beach. Then Jakey and I went after drinking nuts and utos while the womenfolk picked the noddy terns and the booby and cooked them, and the crab, on pemphis-wood coals. We gorged like savages. Free from the last inhibition of civilized man, the cowboys seemed to delight in smearing their faces with bird grease and grime, in snoggling as they poured the coconut water down their rapacious gullets. Nga was a shade daintier than the others; but Elaine, the sweet glutton of the family, managed to smear herself from navel to crown, with a few dabs and streaks on her fat legs and a spot or two on her toes. Johnny and Jakey did their best to be tough and fierce and covered with war paint, and the old man himself came in a close second, as Nat Gould would put it.

After the meal we jumped into the channel for a swim and a partial cleansing, and then, at sunset, we made beds and pillows of magnolia leaves. If it doesn't rain we shall use the sail for a quilt, but if rain comes the sail will have to serve as a tent and we shall have to huddle together as best we can. The usual procedure in such a case is to lay the sail over the canoe, weigh down its edges with stones, and prop it up with a paddle at each crossboom.

I have been writing the last of this by firelight. I shall now lie on the beach, beside *Panikiniki*, smoke a cigarette, and invite my soul in this grotesque, this weird, this fantastic isle so far beyond the edge of the world that I sense here the presence of spiritual things. Good night, cowboys! Good night, Desire! Do you remember, Desire, the time when we walked the reef from Anchorage Island to Tou, how you carried two-months-old Jakey in a net on your back and I carried two-year-old Johnny? How I wish you were with us tonight!

This has been a lazy, happy day albeit I missed my early-morning cup of coffee. The day started, at the first blush of dawn, with a lecture on ichthyology by Professor Booby. He was drolly pedantic. Twittering and occasionally squawking, he shook his head so vigorously that I feared the spectacles, which seemed to rim his eyes, would be shaken off. Mrs. Booby, the only student, was bored stiff; but when the professor had lectured himself dry on the natural history of fishes, and had cleared his throat for a few remarks on the sex life of the solan goose, Mrs. Booby perked up a little, eyed her husband wistfully, and snuggled a trifle closer. Watching her, in the dim morning light, with a background of flushed clouds seen through gaps between the leaves, I thought I could detect the ghost of a smirk on her

somewhat verjuiced face.

I felt comfortable and lazy. The cowboys were fast asleep, so they did not see the mother ghost tern bring a yellow mullet in from the lagoon and feed her fledgling. The breakfast was as big as the birdlet, but he bolted half of it bravely and let the other half protrude from his mouth, to be swallowed when the first half had been digested. This necessitated his perching on the branch with neck thrust out stiffly and beak open, but he didn't seem to mind it; he seemed sensuously happy.

I rose quietly, so as not to waken the cowboys, took my fish spear, and went to the channel. There I found a school of silver mullet so closely packed that I could have speared them with my eyes shut. As it was, I got two with one jab of the spear, and as they weighed over a pound each I did not have to look farther for breakfast.

Next I laid a few coconut spathes on the embers of last night's fire and piled pemphis sticks on top of them. The wind blew them into a blaze in a few minutes, and a half hour later they had burned down to coals, on which I threw the fish, gutted but not scaled. There were plenty of drinking nuts from last night, so I laid five of them on the edge of the fire to warm, wishing that the all but sufficient coconut tree bore coffee nuts.

When the fish were cooked and the nuts warm I yelled some pleasant words to the cowboys, and when they had risen I herded them down to the channel and pushed them in. They splashed about for a few minutes and then scampered up the beach shining both in body and spirit, after which we breakfasted.

The rest of the day was spent on the main islet of Tou, gathering food, eating, lying in the shade to smoke and drowse, shying stones at roosting birds, picking up shells from the outer beach, and, at low tide, gathering periwinkles on the great brick-red "fairway" that leads four miles to the Buckland Cays

We are comfortably tired this evening, but we have enjoyed ourselves so thoroughly that we propose to stay on this islet beyond the edge of the world for several days. Later we will sail the two miles to Bird Islet, then the five miles to Turtle Islet, and finally the four miles back to Anchorage Island. I hope the weather holds good: February is the worst month in the year for a picnic of this kind.

We arrived at Bird Islet this morning, and we found it to be the richest and most beautiful of all the islets on Suvarrow's reef.

Desire, Johnny, Jakey, and I had been here before, but it was only to skirt along the outer beach when on our way to Tou. Today I decided to do a little exploring.

After we had rustled our morning meal I left the cowboys in camp and started through the islet toward the northwest point, which is also the point

closest to the barrier reef; but before I had gone three hundred yards I stopped, with a flutter of excitement and surprise. I had stumbled into a ditch some three feet deep, and then, peering this way and that in the thick undergrowth, I had seen that the ground was crisscrossed with ditches over an area of nearly an acre! It must have been where Jule Tirel had dug for treasure! Jule Tirel! A whole cinematograph of pictures flashed through my mind to end with the Frenchman begging for his life, the oar of a Penrhyn diver crashing down on his skull, and finally Tirel sinking to the bottom of the passage, in the grave with Tom Carlton and Joe Bird!

“Well,” I thought as I started forward again, “here’s a combined Jungle Expedition and Historical Monument for Captain Prospect’s tourists. The golfers can take it in as a diversion from the long drive from Turtle Islet to Tou... . One bob for tea and cakes at the site of Jule Tirel’s treasure hunt!”

Presently I broke through the bush to the outer beach and there walked slowly toward the northwest point, staring with wonder at the birds roosting in the pemphis bushes: frigate birds and boobies, terns and tropic birds, and not a one of them polite enough to grant me more than a casual uninterested glance. Their smug self-complacency annoyed me a little. I felt like knocking a few of them from their perches so as to demonstrate the importance of the white man even among the birds of Suvarrow. Then I became as snobbish as they, for along the tidemark I found first one bottle and then a second one. Each was corked and had a paper in it!

I crawled under a magnolia bush and laid the bottles on the thick mat of leaves, to stare at them for a little space and thus by anticipation whet the thrill of opening them and reading their messages. But presently my curiosity could endure the strain no longer, so I broke the neck from one of the bottles, fished out a paper that appeared old, yellow, and stained, and read:

TO FINDER

THIS BOTTLE WAS THROWN OVERBOARD BY KEITH SHEPHERD EN ROUTE TO AUSTRALIA, BETWEEN MADANG AND SALAMAU. PLEASE WRITE AND TELL ME WHERE YOU FIND IT.

G.O.P. BOX 589
SHANGHAI CHINA

There was no date. I speculated on how the bottle could have reached this desolate spot, both to windward and upcurrent from where it had been thrown overboard. The current in this part of the Pacific flows to the southwest. The bottle must have been carried south to the great westerly drift, thence to a point close to Cape Horn, thence up the Humboldt Current to the Equator, and thence across the Pacific to the southwesterly drift, which brought it here.

The other bottle contained a religious tract, printed in small type on both sides of a single sheet of paper, and with virtually no margins. The caption was in black letter:

Then followed in Roman type:

How Does the Believer
Know that He Is Justified?

And then a verbose sermon, as unnourishing a crust as was ever thrown upon the waters. It was signed “C.S.,” and an advertisement at the bottom of the page informed me that it had been printed by G. Morrish, 20 Paternoster Square, London, E.C. Below and to one side of this had been written in pencil: 25th, 8, 40.

“Hm!” I thought. “Even to the last isle of the heathen, and beyond, back to prehistoric Suvarrow in time, beyond the edge of the world in space, the missionaries succeed in scattering the seeds of the True Faith. Tireless Soldiers of the Cross, they have buttonholed me even here, on Bird Islet, to ask me how the believer knows that he is justified!”

Last night squall after squall yelled over Bird Islet; we got soaked to the skin in spite of our sail, and this morning we turned out of our makeshift tent as bedraggled and shivery as the sea birds roosting in the open. We found that heavy seas were building up along the west reef, the sky was black and ominous, and over the islet great flocks of frigate birds were wheeling—a sure sign of worse weather to come.

We managed to cook a good breakfast, and when we had eaten our fill our spirits were revived and we decided to watch for our chance between squalls and set out for Turtle Islet. The wind being in the west, we would have the reef and shallows to break the worst of the sea. We took two reefs in *Panikiniki's* sail, stepped the mast and stayed it well, got our gear aboard, and set off.

There followed one of the most terrifying experiences I have ever known. The first mile or two was fairly safe sailing; but then the tide started to flow, monster seas piled over the reef and the shallows to form a nasty chop in the lagoon, and from then on it was all we could do to keep afloat. A raging squall, thick with rain, rolled down on us when we were halfway across; sunlight faded into darkness; the canoe pitched and rolled her outrigger under; the waves lapped over the gunwales. I swung her into the wind and tried to hold her close to the reef shallows, but, paddle as I did, we drifted a half mile to leeward before the wind had abated. Soon we were in deep water, too far from the reef to make it swimming should the canoe capsize. Turtle Islet looked misty and far, far away; my heart sank in despair, but I called cheerily to Johnny and Jakey to jump to the outrigger and for Elaine to bail and, laying the canoe off from the wind, nosed her slowly into the choppy sea.

From then on Elaine had to bail continually and Johnny and Jakey had to perch far out on the outrigger crossboom, steadying themselves by holding to

the windward stay. Every now and then the outrigger would be buried two or three feet beneath the water, then, after rising slowly to the surface, it would leap out of the water with a jerk, fly into the air, and I would throw myself on the after crossboom to keep her from capsizing. We did not dare lower the sail, for then we would drift into the open lagoon where the chop was far more dangerous. Then there was the gloomy sky, the black squalls pelting us, the knowledge that Suvarrow's lagoon is infested with man-eating sharks! If the children had not been with me I should have been less frightened. Continually I found myself picturing what would happen if we were capsized. . . .

Well, we got to Turtle Islet, but the weather had turned so bad that we decided not to try to make the remaining four miles to Anchorage Island until the morning. We managed to carry the canoe far up on the beach, on the edge of the shore bush, and then we went to work building as rainproof a shelter as possible. This we managed by making a tent over the outrigger booms, with the body of the canoe as a windbreak. The steep roof kept most of the rain out, and it was improved by laying fronds on the windward side, thus breaking the wind that otherwise drove rain through the canvas.

Luckily my matches were dry. We got a fire going after several attempts, brought in some logs to keep it burning all night, and built a lean-to of fronds to protect it from the full force of the wind and rain.

Drinking nuts we gathered from a low tree by prodding them with the fish spear and pulling them down. Of utoos and coconut crabs there were aplenty, so we managed to make a meal of it. Now the children are drying their clothes at the fire, laughing and chattering; I am dreading the night, and I am wondering if we will be able to get back to Anchorage Island tomorrow or if we will have to weather the storm here at Turtle Islet.

Well, we have had a never-to-be-forgotten primitive picnic, and, albeit it is miserable now, we will enjoy thinking about it later, for it seems that our pains more than our pleasures give us enjoyment in retrospect.

Still a few smokes left in the tobacco tin!

This morning the wind had settled in a northwesterly gale. I knew this meant a week of bad weather, and, husky though the cowboys are, I did not like the idea of weathering it on Turtle Islet; so, bright and early, we got our gear into the canoe and stepped the mast but did not set the sail: the mast alone would drive us forward as fast as we cared to go.

By starting early we profited by less chop in the lagoon, for the tide was low and only the biggest seas spilled over the reef into the lagoon. For the first mile we had One Tree Islet and the Brushwood Group on our lee, so if we came to grief we had only to swim a few yards to the fringing reef. But along the mile of open reef from Brushwood to the Bird Cays we were in as great danger as we had been in the day before, for the tide was coming in, flowing across the shallows to strike the lagoon waves crosswise and build up a chop

that threatened to swamp us. Of course we knew we could swim to the shallows, but it was doubtful if we could wade through the strong current fast enough to make the cays before the tide rose and washed us back into the lagoon. We were all bailing for dear life before we made the Bird Cays; then the chop smoothed down, leaving only the waves rolling under our stern. I sighed with heartfelt relief, rolled a cigarette and smoked it to strengthen me for the final dash to Anchorage Island.

When we came abreast of the south point of Whale Islet I saw at once that to continue in the lagoon would be perilous indeed, so I ran the canoe ashore, took down the mast and laid it across the, outrigger booms, then made a line fast to the bow of the canoe and proceeded to pull it along the shallows the remaining half mile to Anchorage Island. It was bad business. Johnny tried to help me, but the first sea that swept through the shallows nearly carried her away. She grabbed the canoe, however, and managed to pull herself aboard. Then I struggled on alone, waist-deep in the water when the seas surged past me, often nearly carried off my feet, and half the time unable to make any headway. I was working too hard to be afraid. Even the knowledge that the tide was rising, and must soon sweep us into the lagoon if we did not make the land, did not frighten me. I remember eying an approaching sea with a sort of grim amusement and reflecting that Captain Prospect's golfers would have to wear rubber clothes and use celluloid golf balls today.

Of course we made the land, pretty well cold and exhausted, but excited as kids, for just as we were wallowing through the channel, by the Spa, Johnny yelled at the top of her lungs: "Sail ho!"

And, so help me, if it wasn't the sails of a cutter rounding the point of Turtle Islet!

Chapter V

LAST NIGHT we talked about the cutter, we dreamed about it, we worried about it. When we first sighted her we thought she might be *Hurry Home*, for there was no telling whether or not she had a mizzenmast; but once we were home and had studied her through the binocular there was no question about her belonging to a species of vessel much evolved above Captain Prospect's "ship".

She had a long main gaff and a tall mast, she was painted white, and there was an odd structure aft, which I took to be some kind of shelter for the man at the wheel.

I hoped she had an engine; and this was associated with my worry, for she was within the northeast bight where so many ships have been wrecked, the wind was rising, and squalls were darkening the northern sky. The last we saw of her she was beating up slowly on the port tack, four miles off the passage, presently to drive into a huge squall; and when it had passed, night had come down ominous, windy, and sudden.

This morning, on crossing to the outer beach, we saw her in about the same place. We returned to the clearing to cook our breakfast and eat it hurriedly; then we went back to the beach, this time to see the cutter close to the passage. The current was running out strong, and seas from the north were rolling into the passage to build up a tide rip fully twenty feet from crest to trough. In the shoal places the big combers broke continually; along the fringing reef, fifty feet from the beach, enormous seas curled and broke and filled the air with their thunder. Never before had I seen Suvarrow's passage presenting such a wild and turbulent scene. It seemed impossible for a vessel to live in that confusion of foaming seas. I wondered what the men aboard the cutter must be thinking and feeling!

Of course they saw their danger; but there was no turning back, for the wind was dead over their stern, the seas so high that to bring the vessel around would have been to wreck her. They took in the mainsail, however, and with their engine going full speed ahead and their headsails drawing strong entered the reef heads. What a tossing they got then! Several times the cutter sank so deeply in the troughs that only her topmast was visible to us ashore, which means that the tide rip was over twenty feet from trough to crest!

I had my binocular on her. When she rose on a crest I could see a man at the starboard shrouds and another at the wheel. Both, like good sailors, kept their eyes ahead; and this must have taken courage, for every moment or two a great sea would surge up behind the tiny boat, lift her stem until she was virtually standing on her bowsprit, fling her forward a few yards, then roll under her to set her on her stem with bowsprit pointing almost to the zenith;

and then, as she tried to climb the wave, the current would drag her back a little so that at times she lost a little more than she gained. But she gained at other times; and once, when a sea broke a few feet aft of her transom and swept her deck from end to end, she was flung fully fifty yards ahead.

It is about three quarters of a mile from the mouth of the passage to the south point of Anchorage Island. It took the cutter fully four hours to make this short distance; then she was safe, for she was out of the current and the tide rip and had entered the lagoon as soon as she had rounded the point.

The five of us hurried across the island to where we had left *Panikiniki* and paddled out to meet the cutter. When we were close, and had read the name *Vagus* on her bow, we threw a line aboard, which one of the men made fast, and then climbed on deck.

A short, red-faced man of about thirty, with a broken nose and the combined appearance of a pugilist and a dreamer, was at the wheel. I noted that his black hair was parted and plastered down, and I smelled the odor of island-made coconut oil scented with gardenia flowers; so I knew he was a South Sea Islander. He grinned rather alarmingly and stretched out his hand. I gave him my name.

"Frisbie!" he exclaimed, as though lost in astonishment. "Not *the* Frisbie — *the* Frisbie of Puka-Puka!"

"Yes, that's me," I replied, somewhat abashed by his mannerism.

"Shake hands again!" he cried. "I never expected to meet the Frisbie of Puka-Puka at Suvarrow!. . .My name is Powell."

Then came my turn. "Not *the* Powell!" I cried, trying, but probably failing, to put the same warmth into my tone. "Not *the* Powell of Palmerston Island!"

"The same," he replied, grinning, and we shook hands yet once again, which made us even, the first one having been in mutual esteem, the second one in my honor, the third one in honor of Powell.

"We'll have a glass of rum when we get anchored," Powell added, which tied another knot in the bonds of friendship and made me aware that I had met a good man—according to the South Sea trader's definition of the word "good."

Then the cowboys shook hands with Powell, and then the other member of the cutter's company came aft and was introduced as John Pratt of London, the owner. He was of about the same age as Powell, but where the latter was a sparrow hawk John Pratt was a heron. He had the same drolly humorous expression; his eyeglasses added to the expression, and his long limbs completed it. His hair was thin and sandy, his nose long and pointed, his ears large—and his hands! I noticed them the instant I had thrown out my hand to grip his. Never had I seen such hands. The most casual glance determined that they could belong only to an artist. The fingers were twice the length of mine, but they were not slim or knotty or nervous fingers: they were long and thick and straight and immensely strong. You knew they would grip anything firmly, without a tremor, and would move with uncanny precision.

“Oh, you’re F-F-Frisbie,” Pratt said, stuttering slightly. “I know all about you.” Then, a fleeting sparkle in his otherwise dull eyes, he repeated what Powell had said: “We’ll have a glass of rum when we’re anchored.”

“You had a nasty time of it in the passage,” I remarked, and at that the dull look came back in his eyes, and, “Yes,” he muttered, “there was a bit of a chop,” then turned to set up the mainsheet.

Again I noticed his hands. They dosed around the rope with a sort of joy in action, and they gave a long steady pull which somehow made me think of drawing a straight line with a pencil. Accuracy, precision, ease in perfect accomplishment, nerves tuned so nicely that there seemed to be no nerves at all, deft fingers that could draw a cathedral or an engine part, remove an appendix or cut a throat with equal dexterity!

With *Panikiniki* towing astern I piloted them to the anchorage, and when she was snugly berthed Powell and Pratt invited the five of us below. Cakes and lime juice were served to the cowboys, Barbados rum to the three hard-doers of the South Seas ... And now let me leave myself sipping Barbados rum and listening to the odyssey of Powell and Pratt, and leave the cowboys gorging on lime juice and cakes, to describe briefly this “hollow ship” and its two adventurers.

Vagus is the finest little vessel I have ever seen, heard of, or dreamed of. She was built on the lines of the Colin Archer North Sea lifeboats, the same lines Ralph Stock used for his famous *Dream Ship*. She is a double-ender, forty feet long, beamy, with a low freeboard, about eight feet draft, and with planking of two-and-a-half-inch English oak. Forward is a small winch that actually works. Aft of the winch is stowed a seaworthy dinghy. The mast is tall and must be fully a foot in diameter at the deck; the boom is as heavy as *Hurry Home*’s mainmast. The stays are of plow steel, and not a spot of rust; the running rigging is likewise of the best that can be had. From the mast there is a cabin house, only about a foot high and with wide alleyways, running aft to the bridge deck, where a wide hatchway leads below. A canvas shelter stands on the bridge deck, like the hood of a buggy. It extends aft over the cockpit to the wheel, so the helmsman can take shelter under it in bad weather or sleep under it when the wheel is lashed. In the cockpit are the engine controls, the binnacle, and a thirty-six-inch hardwood wheel. The decks are of teak, the deck fastenings bronze.

Below, elegance has been sacrificed for simplicity. Everything is strong and of the best quality: waterproof canvas pillows and mattresses on the bunks, a primus stove with a five-gallon supply tank in the galley, instruments of navigation that delight the eye, eighteen months’ supply of food—corned-beef hash and chili con carne, Hormel hams and chickens, ginger-snaps and cheese biscuits, dill pickles and Roquefort cheese, American canned beer and French bottled wine ... Oh Lord, why enumerate? It makes my mouth water to think of all the grand food stowed away on *Vagus*. The cowboys, little hypocrites, are cajoling Pratt shamelessly, petting the heron and feeding him

coconuts and fish, in the hope of making a substantial inroad on his cases of jam and ginger-snaps.

Everything inside the ship is of the best that can be bought. The bronze gimbal lamps, the Diesel engine, the shelf of fine books, the woolen blankets for cold weather and the linen sheets for hot weather. John Pratt's boat is the one I have dreamed of since I was old enough to know what a boat is. All my sins and all my failures, I verily believe, have been begotten by a feeling of intense frustration because I could never hope to own a boat like Heron Pratt's *Vagus*.

Oh well, let it go at that.

While sipping the Barbados rum I learned that John Pratt was a commercial artist. A year before World War II he sailed out of England, with a partner, for the West Indies. Arrived at Cuba, he sent his partner home, then cruised in the Caribbean for three years. A few months ago, in Panama, he provisioned his boat for an eighteen-month cruise and set out alone for Rarotonga. He made the passage in eighty-odd days. "I just let her g-g-go," he told me with a kind of childish simplicity that was altogether charming. "I never t-t-took in sail but once, but I hardly left the deck either. I always slept in the little h-h-half shelter aft."

At Rarotonga his arrival caused no little excitement. It seems that the Tartarins of this more than provincial Tarascon took *Vagus* for some kind of an enemy vessel. They sounded the tocsin; the home guards jumped to their guns; the civilians evacuated the little port of Avarua! Then the doughty Bill Bryan, ex-bosun, ex-wharfinger, ex-pilot, manned his lifeboat and went out to *Vagus* bristling with arms. There the doughty Bill found the heron alone, more flustered than Bill himself, stuttering, "But really, you know, I'm not a b-b-bleeding Jap!"

After stretching his legs ashore at Avarua, Pratt sailed to Palmerston Island, where lived Ronald Powell, a friend of former days And now for a word about the sparrow hawk.

"Ron" Powell is a master shipwright, sailmaker, carpenter, cooper, blacksmith, sailor, and a dilettante in the arts, surrealism being his fad at the present moment, much to the disgust of the true artist Pratt. Powell has written a good book, but, more to his credit, he has built, at Palmerston, boats as fine as any shipyard could put out. With these boats the people have established a successful fishery. Powell has made his own salt from sea water, salted and smoked his fish, made his own barrels from coconut wood, packed the fish in them and shipped them to Rarotonga by the ton. He has raised Palmerston from poverty to moderate opulence. Before he married and settled on the island there had not been a ship sighted for *four years*; now *Hurry Home* calls every six months to lift his cargo.

When many of the "better people" of the South Seas are forgotten, Ron Powell's name will be remembered with those of Ellis, Strickland, Williams, Jennings, and a host of other renegades and beachcombers who have brought

the Polynesians a useful culture if they have not taught them the hypocrisy, sanctimony, intolerance that passes for religion in the Pacific.

When Pratt put into Palmerston, ten days ago, Powell joined him for a short cruise among the Northern Islands. . . And here they are now, at Suvarrow. . . And there we were—the cowboys and I—drinking Barbados rum and lime juice, gorging on cakes, raising our voices to see who could do the most talking in the shortest time.

Presently I told them about the warplanes and how we had taken cover and later had sailed in search of castaways on Tou Islet, and when they asked me I told them about the star on the warplanes' wings.

They had a good laugh over that and explained that the insigne, a star, was one of the stars from my own star-spangled banner. Then Pratt asked me what kind of planes they were, land or sea, and when I replied that I hadn't the foggiest idea he laughed again and told me I was a generation behind the times, for any child in England or America would instantly have catalogued them as sea, land, or amphibian; fighter, bomber, or observation.

Abruptly Pratt glanced thoughtfully at Powell, smiled, and, turning to me, said: "I think I can explain those warplanes. They were looking for the lost aviators. At Rarotonga B-B-Bill Bryan told me to keep a sharp lookout for them."

"That's it!" Powell exclaimed, and then he told me that three weeks or a month ago an American bomber, with three men aboard, had disappeared in this part of the Pacific. It is probable, Powell thought, that the men had saved themselves by inflating their rubber raft and drifting on it. And it is possible that they are still alive, being tossed by the storm, perhaps in sight of Suvarrow's barrier reef!

I then told them of the light we had seen over Tou Islet. They could make nothing of it but surmised that it might have something to do with the lost aviators and the warplanes.

I find that I am not writing very coherently. Let me blame it on the Barbados rum. It is half-past four in the morning, I note by flashing my torch at the clock-barometer combination on the wall opposite my bunk. (Torch batteries from *Vagus*.) The glass reads something like 29:70. Very low! We're in for a bad northwesterly, I fancy. The treehouse creaks and shakes with every blast of wind. Perhaps I made a mistake by straddling the house between two trees. Now if the trees bend in opposite directions the house may fall. The phlegmatic heron is sleeping on the floor under my bunk, where the cowboys usually sleep. The sparrow hawk is in the ground-house sleeping with the children.

I shall rise and kindle a fire under the teakettle. There must be a glimmer of dawn behind the black pall of clouds.

We have spent the day in hearty eating, drinking, and talking. Heron Pratt has been generous with his ship's provisions; also he has brought ashore a bottle of Barbados, which last has gone the way of all rum in the South Seas. We have heard about the delectable West Indies, and Pratt has told us of his ego-inflating experience in going through the Panama Canal with a private pilot assigned to his boat and of having the great locks opened for him alone—all for something like fifteen dollars. And he has stuttered eloquently over the hospitality of the Canal Zone people, the cheapness of food and drink, the off-color joys to be found by crossing out of the Zone into the nameless dives beyond. Also he has told us what it feels like to set out alone for a five-thousand-mile open-sea voyage in a forty-foot cutter, of the monotony of calms in the Gulf of Panama, the glory of the trade wind in the South Pacific. He didn't seem to mind being alone at sea. He must have a temperament as serene and philosophical as a heron's seems to be. He might have stopped at the Galápagos, for he passed close to them, but he had heard stories of yachtsmen having received bad treatment there, so he satisfied himself with a glimpse of their mountains above the horizon. And he did not stop at the Marquesas, Dangerous Archipelago, or Tahiti, for he thought they might have gone over to Pétain's France, and satisfied himself, therefore, by sailing within a few hundred miles of them. But Rarotonga he felt sure would be a safe Allied port, if there was one left in the South Seas; and anyway, he wanted to drink a cup of tea with his old friend Ron Powell of the broken nose and the artistic temperament, and Rarotonga is the port of entry for Powell's island.

Powell and I talked about our mutual friends among the islands. The bottle of Barbados no more than sufficed to keep our throats charged for the mere mechanics of discussing every Tom, Dick, and Harry from Easter Island to the Fijis. We even talked of Captain Prospect, wondered if he was out in the storm or if he was still searching for Nassau and Manihiki, someplace in the moonlit reaches near Honolulu or Singapore.

I suppose I have just written "Singapore" because Pratt brought us the news that the Japanese were at the gates of that city and it was expected momentarily to fall. It seems incredible, or rather unreal, as does all news from the outside world. I respond to such news as I do to a discussion about books; for the life of me I can excite in myself only mild interest. Instead of, "Have you heard about Singapore?" substitute, "Have you read *The Conquest of Mexico*?" and then carry on the conversation, recalling various of the incidents of horror and high romance in Prescott's history, and the sensation you will feel will be identical to the one I feel when Pratt speaks of the war. This is not due to any unpatriotic apathy in my nature, but it is because I have heard so little of the struggle that I have not been able to develop, by accumulated shocks, an emotional awareness of it. My awareness is almost

entirely intellectual, and of course such an awareness can no more make the blood run hot, the eyes glint, the breath come fast than can an awareness of the function of zero in mathematics.

Pratt gave us good news when he told us of the reverses the Germans are suffering from the Russians. As to the United States, he says that my country is not yet properly in the war and that probably she will be delayed for some time due to the heavy losses to her fleet in Pearl Harbor.

That one piece of information—which I had already heard vaguely from Captain Prospect—brought the war a little nearer to me: it has determined me to return to the United States as soon as I can. Hawaii is only about two thousand miles away as the crow flies, but God knows how many thousands of miles lie ahead of me or how many months of travel! I have now been on my way six weeks, and I have managed to sail some two hundred and fifteen miles farther from Hawaii than was my point of departure.

Well, we yarned and yarned; we drank Barbados rum and coconut water; Powell and Pratt ate coconut crabs and uto pudding; the children and I gorged on Hormel ham, biscuits and jam, tinned peaches and cakes ... and all the time the wind howled evilly and shifted more and more to the north, which is just the opposite of what it should do, damn it! Seas built up on the reef, which means that the passage has become so rough that there is no hope of sailing out to sea. This last is what Powell and Pratt want to do, but a glance at the passage firmly changes their minds. They are here now, and they'll have to stay until the weather moderates. Their boat is safe enough, for there doesn't seem to be much danger of the weather getting worse. The barometer remains steady at 29:70.

Tonight the little treehouse shivers and creaks with every blast of wind. Pratt, the nerveless heron, doesn't seem to mind it, but I do. I have not mentioned to him that there is a tall coconut tree leaning over the house, and I doubt if he has noticed it. He moves about in a kind of bewildered way, as though he were lost in some profound philosophical deliberation. His dull, myopic eyes blink goodnaturedly and vacantly from behind his thick-lensed glasses. No wonder he didn't mind the eighty-odd days' sail from Panama to Rarotonga. Perhaps he, like myself in relation to the war, was only intellectually aware that he was at sea.

Powell has taken charge of the ground-house, where tonight he is sleeping again with the children. I find him a difficult person to describe, and I more than half suspect the reason to be that he is a good deal like myself. Oh well, I suppose that most of us in the South Seas acquire similar characteristics.

The wind has been in the east-northeast today and seems to have settled there. It is blowing at about a force eight, which in other words is a full storm. This is the strongest wind I have experienced in the South Seas save only for the edge of a hurricane that I went through in Puka-Puka. The passage is a

nightmare of confused fighting seas. *Vagus* is weathering it handsomely. We went aboard her this morning in *Panikiniki*, started the engine, and steamed close to where the anchor had been dropped, there to drop a second hook and then let the boat drift back until both chains got an equal strain. After that, feeling better, we sat in the cabin and looked through Pratt's scrapbook. It contained mostly clippings from magazines in which his drawings had appeared. There were many drawings of German automobiles. When I asked him if he had been in Germany he said that formerly he went there once a year to attend some kind of an automobile show and during one of his visits had met Hitler at a dinner given to foreign correspondents. Hitler, the heron claimed, did not give the impression of being a man of blood and steel. "He was quite a cheery little fellow," Pratt told me, "full fun and jokes, and very friendly to us."

It was snug and comfortable in the cabin; the vessel pitched slightly; somehow I felt securely isolated from the ominous weather outside. But when I went on deck a wet blast of wind slapped my face, the cutter seemed suddenly to pitch and roll, the lagoon's face had a nasty look. Big seas, piling over the reef and shallows, had whitened the water with foam; long reaches of chopping waves curved away to the west as far as I could see. I noticed that the wharf, for the moment, was entirely under water. Seas were washing up the beach and into the jungle. The sky was ghastly.

"There's nothing more we can do," said Powell. "I'll break out some tinned pineapple and biscuits for Ropati and his cowboys and we'll go ashore."

"Yes," Pratt agreed, "and break out a dozen c-c-cans of beer. I don't mind losing my boat, b-b-but I'd hate to have all that b-b-beer go to the bottom."

When we had paddled ashore we hauled *Panikiniki* well above the high-water mark; then, in as casual a way as possible both for my own peace of mind as well as for the cowboys', Powell's, and Pratt's, I drove a few spikes into the beams of the treehouse and fixed four braces to the ground-house posts. Glancing at the barometer, I found it had dropped to 29:50

We now know there is a hurricane brewing somewhere in this vicinity, but we do not speak of it. A hurricane on a tiny island of twenty five acres, with the highest elevation thirteen feet, and nothing more substantial underfoot than sand and gravel, is a nasty thing to contemplate. If a hurricane strikes us *Vagus* will be lost, the houses will be blown away, some of us may be killed, and it is very possible, indeed almost probable, that the whole island will be swept away. In such an eventuality, when Captain Prospect returns he will find only a bare coral reef, with a few bewildered sea birds winging overhead, perplexed at the disappearance of their old nesting ground.

I am beginning to believe that Pratt's attitude of complete dissociation, or abstraction, or nonchalance, is the outward manifestation of profound fatalism. At most times he seems lost in spiritual detachment from the vulgar physical world, but when his eyes brighten and he takes cognizance of the

world about him it is to meet one with almost childish simplicity and candor.

This evening, as we sat at the shore end of the wharf, watching *Vagus* strain at her anchors, trace with her masthead great arcs in the gloomy western sky, I offered the heron a penny for his thoughts. I had expected him to reply that he was worrying about his ship, but he told me he was thinking of the three aviators, perhaps still alive, clinging to their rubber raft, tossed about by the storm.

"There are lots of people worse off than we, aren't there?" I muttered.

"Worse off?" Pratt exclaimed, for the first time showing me a fervent side to his character. "Even if we have a hurricane it will be nothing to complain about. A hurricane is a thing of Nature; it is one of the inevitable things of the physical world—like earthquakes and seismic waves. A man is a fool to fret over the inevitable . . . But think of the people in Europe suffering indescribable agonies when they might be living in peace and happiness! Those are the kind of calamities that both discourage and terrify a man, and simply because they are unnecessary. When I feel like pitying myself I think about bombed London; and now, if I start thinking about the danger my cutter is in, I turn my thoughts to the three aviators drifting out at sea. If my vessel is lost it will be through an act of God, but if those aviators die at sea it will be through the imbecility of man!"

Just then I caught a whiff of gardenia-scented coconut oil and, turning, saw the sparrow hawk standing behind us and the four cowboys coming down the path from the clearing.

"How about those cans of beer?" Powell suggested. "It's getting late. If we don't crowd sail we'll never finish them today!"

Pratt grinned and started to rise, but just then the four cowboys, with ear-rending whoops, tore past us, shedding shirts and dresses as they ran, to plunge headlong into the turbulent water by the wharf. A startled cry came from the usually phlegmatic heron, but he settled back with a bewildered look when Powell and I urged the savages on.

I felt proud of my toddlers then, particularly so of four-year-old Nga, who thought nothing of paddling dog-fashion into the deep, churning water. The waves bashed her and ducked her, but she responded by turning a somersault. The current carried her to the wide floodgate at the shore end of the wharf, but she let herself go, to be swept through the gate and lost for a moment in a seething pool of foam. It looked as though she were doomed to have her head bashed on the coral blocks at the sides of the floodgate, to be drowned instantly, to be carried out through the passage to sea, but she knew herself to be safe as a bug in a rug. So much did she enjoy the ride that, when she had been carried fifty yards down the beach, she climbed ashore, ran back to us, jumped in, and did it all over again. And so much did Powell and I enjoy it that presently we plunged in to join her—and the other three savages. Pratt stayed on the beach. Like a true heron he could float but he could not swim a stroke.

In a half hour, remembering suddenly the beer, we herded the cowboys out of the lagoon and up the path to the clearing, ordered them to prepare food and plenty of it, and then settled down to the important business of a South Sea Islander's life.

We're in for it, I'm afraid. Last night the seas broke through Anchorage Island, at its lowest and narrowest place, to wash a clean channel from the outer beach to the lagoon; also they flooded about five acres on the northern point. The whole ocean seems to have raised its mean level by about six feet. Violent squalls intermittently slash across the island, and when they come it is wise to take shelter, for the raindrops prick the skin "like pins and needles," as Mark Estall said of the hurricane at Hikueru. After a heavy squall the wind abates a little, to about the violence of a gale; sometimes a misty sun shows furtively beyond the racing storm clouds,

Powell has been busy with *Vagus'* sails, patching one and sewing a reefing band across the other. Perhaps he keeps at work to divert his mind from the storm and the possibility of losing the cutter; or perhaps, like myself, sailmaking stimulates his mind, and therefore, as he takes his stitches, his thoughts are far away on Palmerston Island, where pretty little Elizabeth Powell awaits both her husband and her eagerly expected baby.

Throughout the morning Pratt lay in the treehouse, improving his mind with *The Decline of the West*; but this afternoon he went to the beach to watch *Vagus* pitching and straining on her moorings two hundred yards beyond the end of the wharf. When he returned to the clearing he told us that one of her anchor chains had parted!

I got out my binocular to verify that the starboard chain was hanging straight down and swinging a little with the tossing of the cutter. We decided to go aboard her at low tide this evening, when there might be less chop in the lagoon, and try to get the big sheet anchor over the side.

This we did. The cutter was now in the lee of Anchorage Island, for the wind had shifted to the northeast; but still it was a man's job getting the canoe launched, for the reef combers swept around the north point and along the lagoon beach, to bash against the stone wharf and submerge it a good six feet deep, then surge far into the interior of the island. However, we waited for a calm spell, ran down the beach with the canoe, launched her in the lee of the wharf, and paddled furiously into deep water. There the wind caught us and sent us scudding out to the cutter so lively that boarding her was like changing horses by a pony express.

We made *Panikiniki* fast to the taffrail and went to work as smartly as we could. First there was the big 100-pound anchor to hoist out of the forepeak and shackle to the remaining fifteen fathoms of starboard chain. Then the engine was started, and we moved slowly ahead, at the same time hauling in with the winch about five fathoms of the chain on the port anchor. That was as

much as we could get in, for a long cavalcade of chopping waves swept down on us to strike us with such force that, with the engine going full speed ahead and both Powell and I straining at the winch, we drifted back until the port chain was straight and taut as a bowstring. Up went *Vagus'* bowsprit in a wild heave, adding another ton or two of strain on the anchor. For a little time the sea vagrant heaved and tugged at her mooring. Afraid that the chain might part, Pratt lifted the new anchor chest-high and, by some faculty unknown to landsmen, balanced himself on the reeling deck to literally "cast" it over the starboard bow. Oddly, even at that moment, in the strain and excitement, I noticed how Pratt's fingers had closed around the stock of the anchor in what seemed fierce joy in proving their strength; then I turned my eyes to *Panikiniki*, afraid that she might have been swamped or broken loose; but she had weathered the seas better than had the cutter.

It was getting dark, with dense black clouds piled above the western horizon and ugly squalls looming to windward. What if the anchor chains parted while we were aboard? There were no more anchors. There was no possibility of sailing or steaming in this wind. We should be swept across the lagoon to the southwest reef and, if we missed Tou Islet, end our days ingloriously in the awful turmoil of breaking seas ... while the children, left alone ashore, with a hurricane brewing. . . .

"Let's get out of this!" I yelled when we had payed out all the anchor chain.

"Just a minute!" came from Pratt. He jumped down the companionway to return in no time with four bottles of Barbados rum, two under each arm. Then he closed the scuttle and we all climbed into the canoe. We cast off and bent our backs to the paddles with every ounce of strength we had, and every ounce of strength was scarcely enough. The wind was nearly dead in our teeth, but that was not so alarming as the current, which swept us alongshore toward the south point.

There is something fearful about the destructiveness of inanimate things; and this, perhaps, is because we sense that they are impervious to the human qualities of pity and forbearance. We cannot argue the point with them, quell them by threats, appeal to their better natures, bribe them with cash money. This evening we knew that if we did not quickly make the shallows the whole force of the current would grip us, sweep us round the south point, and carry us to sea. Again I thought of the cowboys, alone ashore, waiting for their old man to come home. The thought put more strength in my arms than has ever been there before. We drove the canoe into the shallows, then jumped out and, because no seas were running, managed to rush *Panikiniki* up the beach. We had missed being swept around the south point by a matter of yards and seconds!

Once on the beach, we felt so exhausted that we could scarcely lift the canoe; but lift it we did, and we carried it well above the wash of the highest seas, there to make it fast to a coconut stump.

We were now on the south half of Anchorage Island, a third of a mile from the clearing and separated from it by the newly scooped out channel a hundred yards wide; so we had to run the gantlet of seas across the new channel to reach the north islet. It was nearly dark when we made the dash across. The water was to our knees and the bottom uneven, and Pratt, more than half blind at night, had to be led by Powell and me and supported when he stumbled. Once, as we ran, I glanced down the channel to the passage, but only for an instant. It seemed, in the gloomy light, that snow-capped mountain ranges, from some cataclysmic upheaval, were tumbling, colliding, crashing in awful turmoil; and, above the clamor of the wind, their almost human outcry came to me as the yelling of the hounds of hell. By the slimmest chance we three had escaped becoming a part of that scene of annihilation!

The gods of Suvarrow were with us; we were well up the beach of the north islet before a sea came from lagoonward to surge through the channel like a tidal bore, then meet a comber from the passage, drive into it, seemingly explode, and blast into the air a cloud of spray which the wind caught and hurled back to the lagoon.

When we got to the clearing we found the cowboys playing blackjack by firelight. The heron opened one of the bottles of rum. A big tot of it was taken gratefully by all hands. A second tot eased my nerves sufficiently to make this journal entry.

We are all sleeping in the treehouse tonight. I have cotton in my ears to deaden the noise of the storm and to deaden the ominous sepulchral groan that comes from one of the tamanu trees, like a warning of doom, each time the tall coconut tree, leaning over the roof, rubs against one of the limbs of the tamanu.

Three men and four children are in this tiny house measuring six feet by eight. What a mess the tall coconut tree will make if it falls on us tonight!

When I woke early this morning I saw Pratt standing at the west window, his head and shoulders thrust out and, so help me! his right leg cocked up so the foot rested against the side of his left knee, The perfect human heron! For a little time he was motionless, then he scratched the side of his knee with his foot, stretched his neck first to the right side and then to the left, and finally made a rotary motion with his two shoulders, his hands on his hips, reminding me of the physical-culture exercises my aunt Charity performed to the end of her days, morning, noon, and night, hoping thereby to alleviate her burden of bodily woes.

Again Pratt was motionless, but abruptly he put his right foot down, thereby resuming the character of Mr. John Pratt of London, turned, noted that I was awake, and:

"She's still there," he said. "I can see her m-m-masts."

We had a good breakfast, then we left the clearing to walk toward the

lagoon beach. We found that during the night the seas had swept inland halfway to the clearing and had cleaned out every sign of jungle, leaving the coconut trees standing in pure white sand. It was a bewildering sight. Here, where a day or two ago Johnny and I had hunted coconut crabs in dark and all but impenetrable jungle, was smooth, clean, sloping sand staked off with the slim, pole-like boles of coconut palms and, here and there, with fallen trees tracing their length down the beach. But we were soon shocked out of our bewilderment, for a great comber, a deluge, swept over the north point, surged down the beach with the noise of a freight train, washed up to within a yard of where we stood, then rolled away to divide its volume between the new channel and the South Islet. For a few moments Anchorage Island had been reduced in size to about five acres!

All the trees on the lagoon side of the island, we noticed, were black with roosting birds. Many frigate birds were still in the air, blown this way and that in wild confusion. Now and again one would be caught by a downgust of wind and dashed into the water. We found plenty of them, maimed or exhausted, on the beach, and we brought a few back to the clearing to be cooked for our noon meal.

Near the outer beach, on the sea side of the clearing, stands a beacon built of solid masonry, eight feet square and as many high. This afternoon Jakey and I went to the beacon, climbed to its top, and for a little time watched the raging fury in the passage. It reminded me of the Clashing Rocks of the Odyssey. "Thereby no ship of men ever escapes that comes thither, but the planks of ships and the bodies of men confusedly are tossed by the waves of the sea and the storms of ruinous fire." No clear water was visible. Combers forty feet high seemed to be breaking in all directions, bashing each other to spurt great geysers of foam high above the turmoil. Above it all a cloud of driving spray blocked off the Gull Group of islets and even the barrier reef on the far side of the passage.

"Suvarrow! Suvarrow! What a siren you are!" I exclaimed. "How you seduce men to your haunted shores, but only to destroy them! You seem to have a feeling for the dramatic in your tragedies, an eye for the fantastic and the grotesque and the spectacular. You have brought together Heron Pratt of London, Sparrow Hawk Powell of Palmerston Island, Ropati and his four cowboys of PukaPuka; you have moored the little sea vagrant in the lee of Anchorage Island; and in the background, in the heaving seas, close by mayhap, you have placed three American aviators clinging to their rubber raft, the hurricane roaring down on them! But beware lest your love of the spectacular lure you into destroying yourself as well as your actors. Already half of your Anchorage Island has been swept away. If the wind increases but a little more, the combers rise another foot or two, you will destroy yourself in your last great drama!"

So I mused as I stood with Jakey on the beacon. We did not try to speak, for it is unlikely that we could have made ourselves heard. Presently Jakey

glanced up at me, with fear in his eyes. I helped him down from the beacon and we returned to the clearing.

Later in the afternoon we went to South Islet and, after a long and wearisome effort, carried *Panikiniki* to the lee of the five tamanu trees in the clearing. Then Powell bent a line from the canoe's forward crossboom to a limb of one of the trees, thus mooring her in case a sea should sweep through the clearing. He then put a strip of matting, a pillow, and a quilt in the body of the canoe and lashed a length of iron roofing above the gunwales. He intends to sleep there, believing that if seas wash across the clearing he will be able to ride them safely. He ought to know, for he comes from an island infamous for its hurricanes. Pratt has decided, in a like eventuality, to trust his life to the treehouse. The cowboys and I will take refuge in the pearling cutter.

At dusk *Vagus* was still weathering the storm, but she was receiving terrible punishment, with the wind holding her bow to the land and the seas striking her beam. We watched her rolling jerkily, her masthead tracing an arc of fully ninety degrees. Sometimes a particularly heavy sea would swing her round until she had her beam to the land, and then the wind and the sea would contend, the one blowing her stem lagoonward, the other bashing it back. We realized that with all this swinging about her anchor chains must be fouling in the coral bottom, and we knew that soon the chains must work under a coral lump close below her bows, when, a sea heaving her up, something must part. We watched her out there, as evening darkened into night, but we did not speak about her, nor did we when we had returned to the clearing.

Now, at 7 P.M., the barometer is at 29.42! The wind still blows from the northeast, which means that the hurricane—if there is one—is headed straight for Suvarrow. Its center will pass to the west-northwest; we will be in the “dangerous semicircle.”

We have strengthened the ground-house with new braces, lashings, and plenty of spikes; and we have taken refuge there tonight. *Vagus*' sails are on the windward side of the roof; they hang over the eaves to the ground, where I have staked them down. My small chest and typewriter, the three remaining bottles of rum, some tea and tobacco, and a few tools and pieces of rope are in the tree house. The pearling cutter, near the water tank, has been secured to a tamanu stump with sixteen turns of rope.

The wind howls; the rain lashes across the island; the coconut trees bend far over, their fronds flung out and clustered together. Sometimes a tree breaks off, usually ten feet from the ground, and is carried fathoms away before it lands.

I have the hurricane lantern in a kerosene case where it burns fairly well. All of the children have on their warmest clothes, and around the waist of each, as well as around my own waist, I have tied a two-fathom length of sennit, with the ends, each about four feet long, dangling down in front. These are for tying us to the trees—should the seas come! . . . It gave me a sinking feeling to write those last words—should the seas come! . . . Damn the wind!

We can stand any amount of wind. We can survive if the wind blows down every tree—so long as they don't fall on us. But the seas! Great combers crashing, thundering over this tiny bank of sand! In Hikueru, in 1906, a thousand people were drowned when the reef failed to stop the hurricane seas!

10 P.M.: We are snug enough. The low jungle, the tamanu trees, and the sails along the windward side of the house keep out most of the wind and rain; but nothing will keep out the ungodly roar—not even the wet cotton I have stuffed in my ears. The windward side of the roof sags far down under each gust of wind; the whole house moves, shudders. Outside, enough moonlight seeps through the clouds to show sheets of rain driving horizontally across the clearing. When I flash my torch into it I can see the jungle, seemingly in convulsions, and the tops of the lower coconut trees flinging their black wings to the storm. I know that only a few yards away the seas are inundating the land.

The children are asleep, unconscious of danger. Pratt sits with his back to a house post and smokes cigarettes. We do not talk, for it would mean shouting in each other's ears; but a fleeting glance, a ghost of a smile, speaks companionship. Powell is in the canoe.

I will sit under the eaves, on the lee side of the house, and watch for the big seas that may come at any minute. When they start flooding the clearing I shall take the children to the pearling cutter and try there to ride out the rest of the storm; but if the cutter proves unsafe I shall tie them to the tamanu trees.

Midnight: I have just been on a tour of inspection during a lull in the rain. First I climbed to the treehouse to find everything shipshape, but to read the barometer at 29:26! In a way the reading was a relief, for it convinced me that we are in the worst of the hurricane now.

Then I went to the path that leads from the tank to the stone wharf, and there I found that the seas had swept up to the clearing or, in other words, to within thirty yards of our house. Practically all the undergrowth between the clearing and the lagoon had been washed away.

Keeping a sharp lookout, with my torch darting this way and that, I ran to within ten yards of the shore end of the wharf, then swept the lagoon with the beam of light. *Vagus* was still there! For a moment I stared at her in mingled amazement and admiration. It must have been an exceptionally calm spell, for she rode easily; and she seemed so snug that, perhaps by association, I felt safe myself. For a moment I did not heed the sense of danger that prompted me to glance to the north. Then the feeling of peril became overpowering. I turned the torch up the beach, and its beam met a towering comber, only thirty yards away and seemingly curled up fifty feet above me and about to crash

down! It carried on its crest a great mass of brush and limbs and coconut fronds! I do not know whether I had time or coolness enough to realize the uncanny silence of the thing—to realize that it seemed to be moving with lethal silence—for the noise of the wind drowned the thunder of the sea. I do not know how greatly the sea terrified me, for three other objects caught my attention immediately and drew from me a scream of horror!

I saw, or imagined I saw, the figures of three men, just under the crest of the wave! They stood stiffly, facing away from me. One of them leaned slightly and seemed to support himself on a staff. Perhaps it was only the stumps of three coconut trees; perhaps it was only the contagious delirium of the night maddening my brain; yet when I recall the scene, now, three half-clothed figures leap distinctly into my mind's eye, the comber curls over them, crashes down; I yell, but the noise of the storm is so great I cannot hear my own voice. And now I wonder: were those three figures the three American aviators or only phantoms begotten by the storm?

Suddenly panic terror seized me. The figures had been buried by the sea. I leaped back, bumped against a coconut tree, and the next instant, by some newborn agility and strength, I managed to climb high up on its trunk. There I swung the ends of my life rope around the tree and held myself tightly against it.

The comber swept beneath me. I could feel the tree shudder. A boulder bashed its trunk. The sea surged away. Weak, trembling, I loosened my life rope and slipped to the ground. Then I turned my torch to where the figures had been, but only to see white, glinting sand crisscrossed with the trunks of fallen trees. Again I turned my torch to the lagoon, beyond the end of the wharf. *Vagus* was gone!

Returned to the clearing, I went to the canoe to get Powell out of it, for, from what I had seen on the beach, I knew that the first wave to flood the clearing would bring with it a great mass of debris, which would smash the canoe. Powell was glad enough to come to the ground-house. He said nothing; just rose like an obedient child and followed me. When we had rejoined Pratt we each took a big tot of rum; and the rum, as earlier in the night, has made it possible for me to make this entry.

I have not told Powell and Pratt that *Vagus* is gone, or of the three figures on the beach, or of my own narrow escape. Now I sit by the kerosene case with its flickering old lantern. Elaine's head is on my lap and the other cowboys are near by. As I listen to the storm I feel very small, and I want to cry when I think of the peril my children are in.

Ten yards from where I sit great hurricane seas are eating away the land.

Chapter VI

IT CAME ON US out of the blackness, at four o'clock in the morning of February 22. We were all sleeping fitfully except for Powell, whose turn it was to sit under the eaves, on the lee side of the house, now and then to flash his torch to windward, on watch for the sea. Elaine and Nga slept with me, each with her head on my arm. Johnny and Jakey were close by. I had fallen into my first sound sleep when Powell woke me with a yell:

“Look out! It's coming! The sea!”

The next instant there was a rush of water, about a foot deep, through the house! Wide awake instantly, I picked up Elaine and Nga, jumped to my feet, stumbled, fell, and was rolled to the far side of the house with all four children. No one of us was hurt. The hurricane lantern, in its kerosene case on top of a chest, was still burning.

When the sea had drained away we sat up to take our bearings. Powell and Pratt had disappeared. Elaine was laughing, but the other children seemed bewildered. I became aware that the noise of the hurricane was much louder now, that its pitch had risen from a roar to a shriek.

There was no indecision, for we had planned exactly what to do in case the reef combers swept through the clearing. In a moment I had Elaine on my back and had tied her there with a quilt. Johnny took Nga on her back, I gripped the hands of the two older children, and we broke out of the house to come against the wind. It struck us like a solid stream of water; and the simile is a fair one, for the air was dense with rain. And the noise! Put your ear to a ship's whistle and pull the cord. That is what it was like. The noise seemed to have density. We became like people suddenly stricken deaf and dumb, maladroitly trying to express ourselves with grimaces and gesticulations. Had another sea flooded the clearing then we could not have heard it; nor could we have seen it, even with the torchlight, until it was within a few yards of us.

We crept through the clamorous blackness. Then I remembered my torch, felt for it, and found it in my trousers pocket. I flashed it in the tank to find it half full of muddy salt water. The galvanized-iron roof was still intact.

A few yards farther and we were at the pearling cutter, which, as I have said, had been secured to a stump with sixteen turns of rope. I put the children in the boat, climbed in myself, and then, for a moment or two, flashed the torch here and there to find the ground crisscrossed with fallen trees and at one side a tangled mass of rusty iron and rotten planks, near where the old trading post had been. I could not see the lagoon beach, nor could I make out the tamanu trees albeit they were not sixty feet away.

I felt no fear and no excitement, but rather a dumb horror, such as one might experience when lost and groping blindly in the inky blackness of the

Roman catacombs. I understood very clearly that I was now being called upon to face death, that my efforts might save us or, quite as likely, be of no avail. I remember that I rolled a cigarette and actually lit it and smoked a part of it by lying in the bottom of the boat and covering my head with a quilt.

An hour must have passed, but still there was no sign of dawn; then a second sea swept through the clearing, this one about three feet deep. It raced toward us with terrific force, carried away half of the roof over the tank, and then swept the wreckage down on us with a great churning mass of bush and fronds and other rubbish. It struck the boat on her beam, heaved her up, and laid her over until she was all but capsized. The five of us were tumbled in her bilge; we felt the water pouring over her sides onto us, and when we had scrambled to our feet we found the boat swamped to her gunwales!

Then the sea spilled away. Turning my torch to the children, I saw them standing to their waists in the swamped boat, facing me. Their mouths were wide open and tears were streaming from their eyes. Of course I could not hear them crying. There was something both agonizing and bathetic about the little picture, which I know I shall never forget.

A second sea came, this one from the passage side of the island. It was not so high as the first one, but it rolled the boat completely over, pitched us out, and drained away to leave us scattered here and there in the wreckage, more bewildered than hurt. Flashing my torch on each of the children, I found that they had stopped crying; and I may as well mention now that they did not cry again—not even when the climax of peril was upon us and it seemed that there was no hope of escape.

We knew then, of course, that there was no hope of security in the boat. The seas had only started to flood the island, and already we had nearly lost our lives. Was there time to take refuge elsewhere? When would the next sea come? I felt a touch of despair: it seemed so hopeless to contend against this almost supernatural power. But the despair was short-lived, for Johnny shook it out of me by pulling my hand and beckoning toward the tamanu trees.

I tied Elaine on my back again and this time took Nga under my arm, for the tamanus were to windward, and Johnny could not carry her sister against the wind. We crawled past the tank on our hands and knees, seeming to force our heads and shoulders into a solid substance, feeling our bodies too light to grip the ground. It was slow work and it was desperate work, for constantly we were haunted by the knowledge that we might not reach the trees before the next sea came. Even now it makes a cold sweat start from my skin when I recall that laborious half hour's struggle when the five of us wormed painfully through the solid body of wind, desperate but not despairing. Brave children! They dug their toes and fingers in the sand and pushed forward like draft horses hauling a heavy load. And the seas! The seas! Would another comber rage through the clearing before we made the tamanus?

Then, all at once, I became aware of the vague shapes of coconuts bowed away from the wind. The formless umbra of tamanu trees emerged from the

denser blackness beyond. Dawn was breaking.

A beam of light flashed from the treehouse. It stabbed this way and that in the rain-streaked darkness. It showed *Panikiniki's* crossboom hanging from a limb; the canoe was gone. It turned up the path, and then we could see that most of the islet was swept clean of jungle, opening a clear path for the next comber to flood the island. Then the torch beam was turned up to a tall coconut, and I noticed how the fronds were all packed together tightly, as though seized, and how they were flung out horizontally away from the wind, seemingly motionless. They reminded me of a wet mop.

We felt a degree of safety when we reached the first of the tamanus, for now, if a sea came, we might clamber up it in time to save ourselves. On a limb up the second tree I saw a huddled figure. Like all the tamanus, this one leaned at about forty-five degrees, so I had no trouble climbing it with Nga and handing her to Powell, whom the figure proved to be. When I left them Nga was bundled in a quilt, sitting in Powell's lap and sheltered by his body.

In the third tree, about twenty feet from the ground, a natural basket was formed by a fork in the main trunk and a number of smaller branches. In our fair-weather days it had been a favorite retreat for the cowboys, their private treehouse. I motioned for Johnny to climb to this fork, which she did, carrying her quilt wound round her waist; and I left her there alone, but with little concern for her, for she is as self-reliant as any grown person I know.

Elaine, Jakey, and I crawled to the last two trees, where my house stood. The ladder was still there, so we had no difficulty in getting into the house. There, perched in the doorway, his chin to his knees, we found Pratt. I flashed my torch in his face, and, for just a moment, I almost laughed at his expression of unutterable disgust. He seemed to be trying to tell me: "So this is your peaceful South Seas! So this is your island paradise with its blue lagoon, its whispering palms, its balmy trade wind! Bah! and bah again!"

We had been up the tree fully ten minutes before the next sea came. It was fairly light by then, so we could see it charging toward us at what seemed the speed of an express train. We saw it uproot a full-grown tamanu tree three feet in diameter at the base, roll it over and over, lift it on its crest, dash it through the ground-house and the remainder of the tank-house, and then pick up the mass of wreckage, and the pearling cutter as well, and roll them in a tangled mess some place out of sight to leeward. Thus, with the ground-house gone, the children and I lost everything we owned save for the clothes we wore and the few odds and ends in the treehouse; but we did not think of our loss: we thought only of the cutter and the death we had escaped!

That sea was ten feet deep where it passed under the five tamanu trees, on the highest part of Anchorage Island, thirteen feet above normal sea level. It was followed by another comber, but now we realized that both were in reality one. Apparently a gigantic sea had rolled over the barrier reef from the north and had struck the point of Anchorage Island, there to divide so its west half flooded the island first, while its east half, slowed down by the current in

the passage, followed a moment later.

As the morning advanced, the wind, still blowing from the northeast, became fiercer; more and more frequently the combers swept the island from end to end, from six to fifteen feet deep where we had taken refuge. For a time we could see the lagoon beach, now not half so far away as formerly, for much of the land had been washed away. There was no sign of the wharf; the turmoil of water was indescribable. We could see the eastern beach too, and sometimes we caught glimpses of amorphous shapes like clouds in the driving rain, rising and subsiding as they rolled along the fringing reef; but soon the rain, thickening more and more, blotted out these shapes of monstrous reef combers; then the eastern beach was blotted out, and before long our circle of visibility did not extend beyond fifty yards.

By ten o'clock the last of the jungle was swept clean away, leaving only a desolate bank of sand with here and there a wind-ravaged coconut tree, a pile of debris, a great lump of coral wrenched from the barrier reef. And how insecure that bank of sand seemed to us, clinging to three of the trees still left standing, isolated in the midst of an ocean homicidal in its frenzy! At least nine out of every ten coconut trees had been uprooted or blown down. I saw only one of them fall. I had been watching the trees to leeward and noticing that they did not sway this way and that, as they had done the night before, but rather leaned far over, as stiff and motionless as steel bows; but when they did move it was always in unison, like a class in calisthenics. Slowly they straightened up a little, their fronds, like arms, stretched out horizontally; then, when the wind shrieked down on them with renewed violence, they bowed their heads away from it with one accord. Watching them, but with my eyes fixed on a single tree, I saw that tree disappear suddenly! It gave me a little shock of panic until I realized that it had broken off some ten feet from the ground and had whipped down so fast that my eyes could not follow its fall. The tall coconut tree to windward leaned so far over that it sometimes touched the treehouse. We avoided looking at it or even thinking of it.

Later in the morning visibility lessened until at times we could see no more than twenty or thirty feet. We thought the air was thick with rain until we tasted it and found it salt; then we knew that the wind was scooping up great masses of the sea itself and flinging them in all but solid sheets across the land.

The little treehouse faced the wind bravely, and the roof stayed on, for I had lashed it down with sennit. Made of green, tough, and pliable *nonu* poles, the house leaned away from the wind: at times it folded down until its sides were at forty-five degrees from the vertical. I stood outside the doorway, braced between two limbs, within reach of the children should they need me. I watched the house bend and straighten in unison with the coconut trees. There was an uncanny harmony about this concurring obedience to the wind that fascinated me horribly; it fascinated me, too, to watch the wind, like a gigantic hand, push the house over until Pratt and the children, crouching in the

doorway, would suddenly be outside the house, then watch the roof slowly move back until it was over their heads again.

Shortly after ten o'clock I noticed that Elaine's lips were blue, and then I remembered the remaining bottles of rum. In a moment I had crawled into the house and removed the patent cap from one of the bottles, which I handed to Pratt, then turned to glance at the barometer. It read 28:32! I tapped it, but the needle did not move, so I concluded that it would register no lower. Lord knows what the true pressure was—or what it dropped to later! Silly though it may seem, the barometer reading brought home to me more than did the wind and sea that we were experiencing a cyclonic storm. Perhaps unconsciously I had been defending my sanity by refusing wholly to admit the truth. Knowing well enough that we were in the midst of a hurricane, I had still refused to accept the fact unreservedly—I had allowed myself a ray of hope; but now the fact was forced on me, will or nill, by the barometer's uncompromising statement: 28:32!

When Pratt had taken a few swallows of rum I forced Elaine and Jakey to drink. They took the raw stuff like little martyrs. It worked wonders: in five minutes their lips were red, their eyes alight, and I believe they were beginning to enjoy the experience. Then I chose my time, climbed down the tree, and went to Powell. I found him cramped and numbed with cold, holding little Nga in arms too stiff to move. I put the bottle to his lips and he drank fully a quarter of it; then he smiled wanly and asked me by gestures if *Vagus* were gone. I replied with a nod, then held the bottle to Nga's lips. She took the rum as bravely as the others, swallowing fully two ounces.

Johnny came last. Incredible though it may seem, I found her in her little basket fast asleep! She was rolled up like a baby sloth, and bundled, head and all, in her quilt. When I wakened her she eyed me crossly, then turned to watch a big sea surge under her tree and sweep on into the desolation to leeward. She refused the rum at first, but I forced her to drink. Later she told me, almost fretfully, that the rum had kept her awake during the rest of the storm!

In the meantime I had taken two or three good drinks myself. Perhaps they made me foolhardy. Anyway, I had been wondering what hope would remain to us if the five tamanu trees fell. I knew it would be possible to save myself. Unencumbered by the children, I could climb a stout coconut tree and lash myself to it; but I knew also that I could not leave my children for the next sea to devour; I could not abandon even three of them so as to take refuge in a coconut tree with one. If the five tamanu trees fell we should all die together. I am not trying to make myself appear a hero; a truly courageous man, in the last extremity, would have resolved to save one of the children. I have no such fortitude. To me death seemed infinitely preferable to life with the recollection of myself safe in a tree watching a great comber curl over three of my children, crash down, and sweep them to an awful death.

It is for this reason that I studied carefully the effect of the seas on an

enormous tamanu tree standing some fifty feet to windward. It would stand, I concluded, so long as there was any land left on Anchorage Island; but it grew straight, and its lowest limb was about twenty feet from the ground.

There was rope in the treehouse. I cut off a few fathoms of it, again chose my time, then forced my way through the solid stream of wind to the base of the tree. Throwing the rope over the lowest limb was easier than it sounds, for the limb was on the lee side where an eddy of wind sucked the rope close to the trunk rather than carried it to leeward. After two or three attempts I got the rope over the limb; then I tied the two loose ends, climbed to the limb and, after pulling the loose ends up, tied knots in them at intervals of a foot or two. The loose ends, dropped close to the trunk, made a good-enough rope ladder.

I felt relieved after this and for some time stayed on the limb to watch several combers wash across the land and to note their appearance under the five tamanus. It gave me a sinking feeling to see how close the rushing water came to the floor of the treehouse: there could not have been more than three feet of clearance! I noticed also that the seas were piling a barricade of fallen coconut trees, fully six feet high, along the west side of the five trees and heaping tons of sand beyond them. This weight would hold the roots down and thus strengthen the trees, but also it would bring the combers closer to the floor of the house. Then I looked on the east side of the trees to see that the roots were exposed where the water, piling over the barricade, had washed away the sand! It seemed, then, that the five tamanus could not stand much longer!

Alarmed for my children, and with half a mind to bring them to the big tree at once, I climbed down the rope ladder and fairly let the wind fling me back to the five tamanus. And I got back none too soon; a big comber all but caught me as I was climbing to the treehouse. For a moment I was too excited to glance toward the big tamanu I had just left. Then, my eyes closed to slits, I peered into the driving rain to see that the tree had fallen! And, to make matters more desperate still, it was at that moment that the big limb, which I had my back to, broke off just above my head and crashed down on the treehouse!

Some god must have looked down on us and saved us, for the house did not collapse immediately. The broken end of the limb, fully fourteen inches in diameter, pushed the roof down slowly, giving Pratt time to climb out and me time to pull out the two children. For a moment I held them between my legs while I glanced over the wrecked house toward Johnny's tree. The smaller branches from the broken limb had fallen about her; now I saw her little hand reaching up from the natural basket in a silly, futile movement toward the branches, as though she were trying to brush them away. She was safe enough for the present, I decided; then I went to work lashing Elaine and Jakey to the limb I had been bracing my feet against. I tied the life ropes loosely, in bowknots, so I could free the children quickly if the tree fell. Pratt had climbed over the wrecked house to the next tree and tied himself to it. I

slipped my life rope around the limb my back was to but kept the ends, untied, in my hands.

During the morning the wind had shifted very slowly from northeast to north-northeast, but from 11 A.M. to 2 P.M. it swung round rapidly to the north. Those were three hours of madness. We experienced something there is no name for in my vocabulary: a sort of insane exhilaration. The violence of the wind had broken through our material bodies to enter our spirits, so that we experienced a wild madness in keeping with the storm itself. Often I wanted to scream louder than the wind, and I believe I did scream, but my poor voice was inaudible even to myself. Of physical sensations I remember only that my eyes burned.

The storm center must have been close to us during those three hours. The wind had ceased to be a wind: it had become a monstrous thing that did not belong to the physical world. For three hours we ceased to live on the familiar Earth; and perhaps that is why I find it so difficult to describe the wind, the sea, our own emotions. Vocabularies were built around the things of everyday life; this thing belonged to the frenzied life of delirium.

The air was now almost solid with salt water driving past us horizontally, seeming to drive its needles through us. The great combers hurled themselves beneath us almost continuously. There seemed to be no land. The tamanu trees were growing out of the sea itself growing out of a sea in turmoil indescribable. The wind lashed us and clawed us and yelled in our cars, and we bowed our heads away from it, bereft of our senses.

I believed we were about to die in a wild nightmare of churning seas and tumbling masses of trees. More than once my brain took crazy flights, made me believe my tree was uprooted, was being rolled by the combers across the island and into the passage; and more than once I broke from my crazy hallucination to find myself holding my breath to keep from drowning.

I thought that Desire was with me, clutching my arm and crying, "The children! The children! The children!" I must have been stark mad at times.

About 2 P.M. the wind shifted suddenly from the north to the northwest, and it was then that the awful thing came down on us—but, alas! I have used my superlatives, I have no words left to describe it! When we saw the comber looming out of the rain we were struck dumb with awe. Distinctly I remember bracing myself for death. Its noise could be heard above the shrieking of the wind. It raged toward us, engulfing everything in its path. It seized the fallen tamanu tree and flung it at us. The comber loomed above us, its crest thirty feet high; and I remember closing my eyes tightly, gritting my teeth, holding my breath, feeling every nerve come up taut.

There was a moment of crashing branches, rushing water. My life rope bit into my flesh; then the ends were jerked from my hands. The comber gripped me and rolled me under. It pitched me this way and that. My head struck something and I nearly lost consciousness. I thought I could hear my children screaming for help which I could not give; Desire's cry: "The children! The children!" Then I was flung against a mass of branches. I clutched them blindly, held my breath, and felt the comber surge over my body. Then the water subsided; and then suddenly quietness! Even the wind seemed hushed! Was it death?

It was fully a moment before I dared open my eyes. When I did so I saw Johnny, lying face downward directly below me, her arms and legs gripping the branches; I was wedged in among a great mass of branches high above her. Then I glanced this way and that, furtively, afraid of the havoc and death I felt certain the sea must have left in its wake. The big tamanu had been flung against the two in which the treehouse had stood; these had fallen, with Jakey, Elaine, and Pratt tied to their limbs, and then all three trees had been pitched against the one that Johnny was in. It had stood! Jakey, his arm badly lacerated, was clinging to his limb, which now lay horizontal, three feet off the ground. Elaine hung limply by her life rope, and I thought her dead until I had climbed down to her and found her only stupefied by the shock. Pratt was hanging to his limb, one rib broken, limp and unconscious. Johnny and Nga were unhurt, and Powell and I had escaped with scratches.

In this predicament we awaited the next sea.

The air had cleared with the shifting wind. Now we could see the havoc wrought on lovely, haunted Suvarrow. Everywhere was desolation—clean-swept sand with here and there a pile of rubbish, a fallen tree, the scattered stumps of coconut palms. Only a few trees had withstood the hurricane; among them was the tall coconut leaning over our house. We stared at this scene of ruin with dull, uncomprehending eyes; we awaited death with fierce impatience; our spirits were broken. We believed we had only to wait for the next comber, when the three remaining tamanus must fall and we must be swept to sudden, awful death!

But there were no more combers! Perhaps the sudden shift in the wind had broken the offshore seas; perhaps once again a god had looked down on us. By evening the wind had abated to the force of a full storm. To us, huddled in the lee of the barricade of fallen trees, so soaking wet that we heeded not the rain, it seemed that there was no wind at all.

Sometime during the night, when the noise of the storm had lessened, we heard, at first indistinctly, then louder and louder, the thunder of great combers rolling over the barrier reef.

Chapter VII

THE LIFE and sparkle are blown out of everything, from the living creatures to the soil itself. The palm fronds droop; the creeping things move sluggishly over the land; the sun seems pale and cold; the sea birds squat, disconsolate, on the piles of rubbish and the branches of fallen trees. The life has been blown out of even the tough *nonu* saplings: they break off at a touch. All the jungle is gone; now white coral sand reflects a lusterless glare. There are three barren sand cays where Anchorage Island once flung its living green against the sky.

We are demoralized. We grope about the wreckage with mouths agape, eyes inflamed, tongues muttering all but senseless jabber. Our hands and feet are swollen; the least scratch pains and festers. Jakey's lacerated arm is puffed and swollen; Elaine coughs continually; Pratt has stabbing pains in his side, where one of his ribs is broken. The terror of our experience, which we were too excited to feel during the hurricane, is haunting us now. We never speak of the storm, but we dream of it. After a long nightmare of surging seas and yelling wind I waken with a feeling of relief. Perhaps the dream is Nature's way of relieving terror.

Nor do we speak to Pratt of his lost *Vagus*. I fancy that his brain is so dulled by shock that he has no more than a hazy awareness of his loss. We see him stalking back and forth on the lagoon beach, his hand pressed to his painful side, for all the world like a bedraggled heron. Powell scratches in the rubbish heaps on the forlorn hope that he may find a stick of tobacco, a tin of tea, or a bar of soap. Formerly he suggested a sparrow hawk; now he reminds me of a badly scarred and ruffled barnyard rooster.

Even the sky is lifeless. Until this morning the atmosphere was so thick that we could not see halfway across the lagoon. Yesterday, with a pale glimmer of sunlight, the air cleared a little; this morning, with the first bright sunlight in ten days, we can see the entire circle of Suvarrow's reef, almost bare of land. There are six islets, now, where formerly there had been over twenty. Bird Islet, where the cowboys and I camped before the storm, has been washed clean off the reef; likewise Whale Islet, Brushwood, One Tree, six of the Seven Islands Group, and all of the Gull Group. Staring at the long stretches of bare coral reef, and at Anchorage Island itself, we begin to realize how narrowly we escaped being washed into the sea. Had the storm lasted three hours longer there would not have been a single islet left on Suvarrow's reef!

Perhaps the strangest sight of all is One Tree Islet, three miles along the reef to the northwest. Formerly it was of about ten acres, heavily wooded, and with one tall coconut tree rising above the lower growth. Now only the tall

coconut tree is left. It seems to contradict every law of Nature, growing, as it does, out of the bare coral. Fancy it, with the empty horizon beyond, its roots planted in the seawashed barrier reef!

Dead coconut crabs, sea birds, rats, and fish are strewn about the land and buried in the piles of rubbish. Last night we smelled their stench; today it is nauseous. The few birds that have survived can be had for the trouble of pulling them from their perches. They are so dazed and exhausted that they make no attempt to fly away when the children hunt them. At night the coconut crabs and the rats crawl like lice over the land; and they crawl over our bodies, unafraid.

Coral boulders weighing tons have been wrenched from the reef and rolled on the land. The tank is full of stones and sand. The ground-house and the tank-house are tangled with debris of trees and nuts and fronds: a piece of roofing here, a corner post at the other end of the island, a strip of galvanized iron half buried in the sand. *Panikiniki's* outrigger has been torn from her and a hole has been bashed in her side. The pearling cutter stands on her stem far down on the central islet. The wharf is gone. The treehouse is a mass of wreckage jammed and twisted about the broken branches of the fallen tamanus. Some of the things I left in the house have been salvaged.

Last night Elaine, pressing her cold little body close to mine for warmth, whispered: "I love hurricanes, Papa!"

We were sleeping, or trying to sleep, in the lee of the barricade that had been piled up on the west side of the tamanus. There was no shelter overhead, but the barricade protected us from the northwest wind.

"Why do you love hurricanes, Elaine?" I asked, and the fat little darling told me, without guile, "Because now you let me sleep with you every night." Then she coughed, as though unconsciously proving her right to be with me. Poor cowboy! Probably she is not seriously ill, but when she coughs it fills me with dread, reminding me of her mother's death.

Tonight we will sleep in the comfort of a house of sorts, for we have salvaged the frond roofing sheets from the treehouse and made a sort of cave of them—a roof with the eaves touching the ground, with the barricade at one gable end and the other end open.

And tonight there will be fire! I should write it in capitals F I R E! When on Monday morning—the day after the hurricane—we checked over our possessions we found that we each had a box of safety matches. Powell's, being in a tobacco tin, was less sodden than Pratt's or mine; and because we were too weak to start a fire with a rubbing stick, we handled the matches with breathless care and put them in a dry, safe place. This morning we laid them in the sun and early in the afternoon we managed to kindle a fire! Now Powell is carrying pemphis stumps to the open fireplace, while Jakey and Johnny are clubbing sea birds to be roasted tonight. Our depressed spirits are reviving.

Soon we will gorge on cooked meat, then we will lie back to watch the moon and stars, to feel the warmth of the campfire, and to be thankful that we are alive.

This morning we followed the reef to where Whale Islet used to be. For a little time we moved about the clean-swept coral, as smooth as a tennis court save for here and there the stump of a pemphis bush; and of course we spoke of the rainy day when the tide had caught us on the reef and we had built a lean-to on Whale Islet and feasted on wide-awake eggs; and when we recalled the little shelter, the grove of coconuts, the familiar aspect of the storybook islet, it was with a feeling of loss precisely the same as one experiences on recalling to memory a dead friend.

A cloud passed before the sun. I turned to see Johnny staring at Anchorage Island. A scowl of perplexity had creased her pretty brow. Following her gaze, I saw that a misty rain had drawn a gauze veil before the island; but still I could see the three sandbanks, the postlike stumps of coconut palms, the leafless tamanu trees. Before the hurricane Anchorage Island had appeared as a dense black oblong set against the sky; now it seemed too tenuous to belong to the material world.

Johnny must have been thinking, or sensing, something of the kind, for, "Look, Papa," she cried, "it is a ghost island now! I can see through it!"

"Yes, Johnny," I thought as we turned homeward, "it is like the ghost of Suvarrow Atoll. The jungle is gone: Bird Islet, Whale Islet, Brushwood, One Tree, and a score of others are gone—but new islets will grow up in their place. Call it regeneracy or call it reincarnation: the sea will pile sand on the site of Whale Islet; it will fill the channels in Anchorage Island; it will build up even the sand cays. Bush and trees will appear; the sea birds will multiply; and in a few years there will be a new Suvarrow rising above the wreckage of the old. For an atoll is a living island: it rebuilds the land the sea has destroyed."

So I reflected, and now, back in the cave-house, I have been wondering if, in this power of regeneracy, an atoll does not resemble a nation, a city, a human being. We see our great cities and we believe they will endure forever, but in truth we are being misled by the spectacular. Earthquakes, bombs, or the decay of a culture lay them low. Then comes a dormant period, but eventually the cities build up again, different than before but, we hope, better. We should not moan too loudly over the loss of our material gods, for "indeed we die many deaths before we die," whether we be cities or atolls or men, and only through these deaths are we goaded out of our complacency and sloth and forced to rebuild above the wreckage of the past.

And I have been wondering if the loss of my personal property is not a blessing. I am beginning to feel a kind of angry pleasure because these household gods are gone. The hurricane has been Nature's way of cleaning

the old deadwood from Suvarrow, and incidentally I have profited by losing my own deadwood. I had chests full of instruments, tools, manuscripts, keepsakes, rags and tags, books that would never be read again but were kept as sentimental reminders of the past—deadwood that had burdened me for years but that I had never had the fortitude to throw away. Like Christian, I carried on my back a burden of possessions, never realizing that the effort to carry them was out of proportion to the pleasure they could give me. Now I am grateful that they are gone. Let these reminders of the past be forgotten; let them molder with the wreckage of Suvarrow. Let the past be forgotten lest it fasten its cumbrous fingers on the future.

Heat, flies, sweat, exhaustion. The heat pours down on the white sand and is splashed back in seething whorls and eddies. There is no shade except in the cave-house and in the tent Powell and Pratt have made from *Vagus's* staysail. There is no escaping the heat and the blinding sun until night brings delectable coolness, darkness, relaxation, rest.

Millions of flies have bred in the bird carcasses; they are so thick that we seldom attempt to eat save in the gray dawn and the late twilight. To escape them we close the open end of the cave-house with old matting, then crawl in the darkened hole to relax for a brief moment or two.

Sweat makes our skin itch and causes inflamed spots under the armpits and in the groins. The salt water aggravates the burning itch. Our only relief is from pouring the rancid water from old green coconuts over our bodies. When it rains, and the fresh-water pools on the north point are filled, we wallow in them by the hour. Pure luxury!

Exhaustion! Every day, by four o'clock, I believe I have come to the end of my tether. Perhaps I have been along the reef as far as Turtle Islet and returned with a heavy load of fish. I have husked fifty utos, worked on *Panikiniki*, improved the cave-house, hunted tropic birds with Jakey. Such would be a fair example of a day's work. At four o'clock I have a huge pile of food under the leafless tamanu trees. It must be cooked for our meal tonight and our breakfast tomorrow.

Well, we have a native oven made of a brick-lined pit. We kindle a fire in it, and when the fire has burned down we simply throw in the food: birds without picking or gutting, fish without scaling or cleaning, husked utos, and the buds of coconuts. Then we cover the oven with pieces of roofing, heap sand on top, and heave a great sigh of relief. In the meantime Jakey and Johnny have brought in enough pemphis stumps to keep the fire going all night, so we have only to lay out our mat by the fire, with a log for a pillow, and then, if there is fresh water on the point, bathe.

It is evening. Already we are feeling a little better. With each degree of darkness our spirits revive. Now the flies are gone. Now the heron and the sparrow hawk come from their camp on the central islet. We feed—that's the

only word for it. We build up the fire, and we sprawl out on our ragged mat to feel the cool night breeze on our half-naked bodies, to fair worship it, almost to cry from sensuous happiness—and also to dread a little the coming of tomorrow’s sun.

This is our life. The cowboys are well and happy; Jakey’s arm has healed; Elaine’s cough is better; Pratt’s broken rib is knitting; the old man’s beard grows apace. In many ways we are enjoying ourselves; but oh! the misery of dreaming of food, food, food! If Satan should offer me a wish for my immortal soul I am afraid that I should be sorely tempted to make as bad a bargain as did the poor man who asked for a black pudding. I should sell my soul for a tin of bully beef, an onion, a cup of tea, and a slice of bread plastered with butter and jam!. . . Away with you, gluttonous thought! I shall take the advice I gave to Heron Pratt. “The trouble with you, John,” I said, “is that you eat too much. All this gormandizing on coconuts and fish is making you liverish. You wanna eat less, like me and the cowboys. Mortify the flesh. Release the spiritual man through fasting, like the yogis do . . . Do you want to hear some things about the yogis?” To this Heron Pratt replied with a piping laugh full of irony and contempt.

Our life is not altogether miserable. When a fern leaf springs up from the barren sand we hold a pagan holiday. Yesterday we saw a coconut tree in bloom, and we cheered the brave tree as though it were a hero—as in fact it was. I sometimes think we are beginning to love the new Suvarrow as much as we did the old one. We admire its pluck. The sea has laid it low, but it will grow up again: even now it is shooting up its first buds of nascent life.

Hurry Home returned on March 25. She had been blown hither and thither and yon, escaping the hurricane, but pitched, bashed, and battered by the nasty weather on the edge of the storm, her chronometer run down, her radio battery exhausted, her almanac of a previous decade, her *Epitome* of a previous century, her captain half blind, her first officer an old woman. But there was plenty to eat, for schools of albacore followed the ship, and there were plenty of coconuts aboard for the first few weeks.

After the hurricane Captain Prospect started hunting for Manihiki in earnest, believing that if he didn’t find it he ought at least to sight Nassau or some other island. He sailed on the port tack and he sailed on the starboard tack; he sailed to the north, the south, the east, the west; he saw land birds and he saw flotsam from the hurricane—but he saw no land.

Captain Prospect became worried, and when his coconuts gave out and his water ran low the worry waxed into something like a blue funk; and finally, when he decided to sail for Samoa, and a day or two later sighted an utterly unknown island, the blue funk assumed the symptoms of panic.

“Land ho!” Tagi sang out from the masthead.

“Where away?” cried the captain.

“Dead ahead!”

“What land is it?”

“I don’t know!”

As they approached the land their panic increased. Here and there were a few tiny islets, a few bedraggled coconut trees, not resembling any land in this part of the Pacific. It was like finding an elephant in one’s garage. One sees the elephant but at the same time refuses to believe the evidence of one’s senses. Something clicks in one’s brain. Perhaps one screams. Certainly one swears never to drink again.

“Damn it!” the captain yelled. “There’s no land here! Haven’t I been dozens of times to every island in this part of the world? This island doesn’t belong here! It’s a mistake—no! it’s a mirage!”

“*Uriia*—hurricane!” said Takataka, and then they began to understand that the few sandbanks were in fact all that remained of once luxuriant Suvarrow. When they had rounded the northeast point, where the Gull Group used to be, and had seen Anchorage Island reduced to three little cays, they concluded that we must have perished. It did not seem possible that anyone could have lived through a disaster that caused such wreckage. Captain Prospect wrote in his log:

March 24, 13^h: Observed Seven Islands, Suvarrow, presenting a badly battered appearance, evidently having been visited by a violent gale, which same *Hurry Home* encountered and weathered handsomely on February 21 at a position 150 miles NNW or thereabouts.

18^h: Light breeze, and still too far off to make the entrance before dark. Am standing off to the NE for the night.

March 25, 5^h: Stood in for Anchorage Island, but the SE breeze too light to stem the ebb so am lying in the offing.

10^h: Anchorage Island has the appearance of being badly swept by a hurricane, with no sign of life anywhere. There are now three small cays with a few coconut stumps where formerly there had been a rich little island of some twenty five acres. On *Hurry Home*’s departure for Nassau and Manihiki on January 24 there were left on the island Mr. R. Frisbie, a Yankee, together with his son and three daughters, who ranged in ages up to ten years. *Hurry Home* has now returned to Suvarrow for water and repairs, has been two months at sea, having failed, due to the storm, to make Manihiki.

As near as can be observed, the following islands have been totally swept away: Whale, the Bird Cays, Brushwood, One Tree, Bird, two of the Tou Islets, New, and all of the Gull Group, while of the Buckland Cays there is not a trace and of Seven Islands all that remains is a small patch of sand with a few dead trees. Anchorage Island has been reduced to one tenth its former area. The seas have swept two wide channels through it, giving it the appearance of three small cays.

When the captain wrote this entry he did not know that we had miraculously survived, nor did he know of Powell and Pratt and the loss of *Vagus*. When we went aboard *Hurry Home* he told us he had expected to go ashore to hunt for and bury our bodies.

Hurry Home has sailed, taking Powell and Pratt to Rarotonga if Captain Prospect can find Rarotonga. We have been left behind, at our own request, for there was less than a drum of water aboard and very little food. The captain would have taken us had we decided to go, but he seemed relieved when we told him we would wait for his return. As it is, he has left us a little tobacco, tea, and soap, so we feel ourselves well off indeed.

The cowboys and I paddled out to *Hurry Home* when she was weighing her anchor. Takataka and Oli-Oli gave us a hand hoisting our heavy case of books from the hold and lowering it to the canoe; then we went aft to shake hands with the captain, Powell, and Pratt, and to wish them a prosperous journey.

"I know you will be all right ashore," the captain said as we moved to the rail. "I'll come back for you as soon as I've gone on the slip and made a round of the Lower Group. You can look for us in the latter part of April, let us say—or in May or June or thereabouts."

The cowboys and I piled into *Panikiniki*. We paddled a little way off, and we raised our voices in three rousing cheers when *Hurry Home's* mainsail went up, three more when her jib and her mizzen were set, and three final ones when her staysail was hoisted, bottom side up. . . . But we were very lonely this evening, with Powell and Pratt gone, sitting on the outer beach of a desert island in mid-ocean, watching Captain Prospect's ship sail away to dissolve gradually in the gray evening light.

"When the next ship comes we must leave," Johnny said as we sat by the campfire that night. "Jakey's pants—and yours too—are full of holes, and my sisters and I have only these ragged old dresses. We must buy plenty of pretty clothes."

"That means money, Johnny."

"Yes," the mother of the family replied thoughtfully; "we'll all have to go to work for our uncle. . . . What is his name?"

"Uncle Sam."

THE END

[illegible]